

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, March 1, 1899, by Frank Tousey.

No. 163.

NEW YORK, MARCH 7, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AND THE MAIL THIEVES!

OR, THE MAN IN THE BAG.

BY A NEW-YORK DETECTIVE.



The mail thief was going to stab Young King Brady. Clara gave the signal. Open went the transom and Old King Brady appeared. Leveling his revolver at Dalton, he shouted: "Stop! If you injure that boy, I will shoot you!"

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The Bradys and the Mail Thieves;

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CHAPTER I.

AFTER THE LETTER-CARRIER.

"Here he comes, Old King Brady."

"Then hide yourself quick, Harry."

"We can watch him from within the saloon."

"Did you mail the decoy letter in that lamp-post letter box?"

"I did. And if Owen Dalton steals it, we'll have him cornered."

The speakers were two Secret Service detectives, each of whom was named Brady. It was five o'clock, on a warm Spring day, and the officers were standing on the corner of Maiden Lane and Nassau street watching a letter-carrier.

James Brady, the tall, gaunt man, with white hair and a smooth face, wore a big white felt hat and an old blue frock coat, buttoned to the chin.

He was the keenest, bravest and most skilful detective in the world.

Some time previously he met a bright boy named Harry Brady and consented to teach him to become a detective.

Harry was then a handsome, dashing fellow, and he became such a good pupil that his keen work rivalled his partner's.

Working together, the pair became famous as the most competent sleuths in the service.

It was on this account that the Postmaster of New York engaged them to run down some mail thieves who had been robbing his department for some time, in utter defiance of the Post-Office detectives.

As most of the local robbery of letters occurred at the box on the corner of Nassau street and Maiden Lane, the suspicions of the detectives fell upon the carriers who emptied that particular box.

Accordingly they prepared a trap for the thief and were watching for their plan to develop, when the letter gatherer came along.

From where the detectives stood in the corner saloon they could look diagonally across the street and keep the letter box under their observation.

Owen Dalton, the suspected mail-carrier, came down the street clad in a grey suit and cap, carrying a yellow leather bag over his shoulder by a strap.

He was a big man with curly hair, a huge mustache and a long imperial, and was of rather distinguished appearance.

The detectives saw him unlock the letter box and pick the letters out one by one, feeling them carefully as he did so, much as if he were trying to find out what they contained.

He finally had them all in his bag.

Moreover, the Bradys noticed that he kept all the mail he took from this particular box separate from the letters he had taken from other letter boxes.

He then started up Nassau street.

"Follow him!" Old King Brady muttered.

Out of the saloon they glided and by keepitig in the middle of the street they easily kept Dalton in sight despite the crowd thronging the sidewalk.

"Why does the thief so persistently rob that particular letter box?" queried Harry as they hurried along.

Old King Brady smiled, took a chew of tobacco, and answered:

"Because thousands of dollars in money and jewelry are mailed in that box by the Maiden Lane jewelers. The thief knows that the majority of the letters mailed there are valuable. That's why so many dropped in that box fail to reach their address."

"Do you think Dalton is the thief?"

"That's hard to say yet. He was well recommended when he secured his job, and during the year he has worked for the Post Office he has been very exemplary as far as the Postmaster can find out. For all that, though, he may be the most cunning thief."

Harry glanced back over his shoulder and caught a view of a red-wheeled cab, drawn by a big white horse, which was driven by a negro who was clad in an old blue army uniform.

"By Jove!" said the boy, "there's that mysterious carriage following us again. Do you recollect how the vehicle kept at our heels from the moment we left the Post Office? Just keep on after the mail-carrier and I'll dodge out of sight and see who's in the vehicle." •

Old King Brady nodded.

At the first opportunity Harry glided into an open doorway.

On came the cab and when it arrived opposite the boy, he saw a man in the vehicle, who was peering ahead out of the front window with a look of eager anxiety upon his face.

Harry could only see his head and shoulders, but he observed that the man wore a black overcoat and a silk hat.

He had a gaunt yellow face, deep-burning eyes, a huge hooked nose and a short, bristly mustache as red as his thick hair.

"That man is following and watching us!" flashed through the young detective's brain. "But what for?"

Just then he saw the negro driver looking at him and observed that the cabman opened a little trap in the roof of the vehicle and said something to his passenger.

Young King Brady's suspicions were aroused.

"I'll find out what this means," he muttered.

Dashing from his place of concealment, he ran out into the middle of the asphalted street and pursued the cab.

Pushing up to the door on the west side, he seized the handle and, giving it a turn, he jerked open the door.

"What do you mean by following and spying on us?" he began.

Then he paused, for the occupant of the vehicle was gone. He had vanished completely.

"Jumped out the other door," thought the boy swiftly.

He darted around the curb and found a dense crowd thronging the sidewalk, but failed to see a sign of the man.

"Lost himself in the crowd!" muttered the boy.

He made a quick search for the mysterious fellow, but, failing to find any trace of him, Harry ran after his partner.

The cab turned into Fulton street and dashed toward Broadway.

Old King Brady had reached Ann street before the boy overtook him, and in a few words he explained what occurred.

"Mysterious," was the old detective's comment.

"Where's the letter-carrier?" queried Harry eagerly.

"There he goes, up Ann street, toward Park Row."

"See! He's pausing in a hallway near Theater Alley."

"Rush ahead till we see what he's doing."

On they ran until they arrived opposite the dilapidated, old rookery into which the letter-carrier had gone.

Harry sped across the street and reached the doorway.

Peering around the frame of the door, he was astonished to see the man who had been in the cab, standing in the hall.

Dalton was handing him a packet of letters.

"Look out!" the boy heard the red-headed man say. "Those Bradys are dogging you. Hurry on lest they see you. If one of them had not become suspicious of my rig, you might have given me the letters in the cab, as I passed."

Dalton did not say a word.

As he suddenly rushed from the gloomy hall, Harry flattened himself against the front of the adjoining house and seemed to be absorbed in looking at the books in the store window.

The letter-carrier passed without seeing him.

Harry beckoned to his partner and Old King Brady joined him.

"Passed the Maiden Lane letters to a pal in here," whispered the boy.

"Just what I suspected. Did you see his confederate?"

"I did. He was the man in the cab!"

"Good gracious! When he escaped you he ran here then?"

"Exactly. Let Dalton go. We can find him later in the

Post Office," said the boy. "We must recover those letters from the mysterious red-headed fellow. Come on into the hall."

They glided through the doorway.

Ascending the stairs ahead to the next floor, they saw a solitary door.

Owing to the fact that there were no halls, the detectives were forced to believe that the man had gone through that door.

A light in the keyhole attracted Harry's attention and he knelt down before it and peered through.

The boy saw a small, square, carpetless room lit by a single gas jet over which hung a steaming tea-kettle.

The mysterious man had a huge packet of stolen letters on a table beside him and was steaming one of the letters open.

Finding no money in it, the man sealed it up again, flung it on the table and steamed open a second one.

A ten-dollar bill dropped out. It was a marked bill the Bradys had mailed.

The man picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"It's time for us to break in," suggested Harry. "That's the decoy letter."

"No need," replied Old King Brady, seizing the knob. "The door ain't locked."

"Rush in on the thief then. He's got the evidence on him."

Open went the door with a bang and in they darted.

A cry of alarm escaped the man and he glanced around at them.

"The Bradys!" he gasped hoarsely, for he knew the pair.

He rushed for a door at the other end of the room and vanished.

Into the room dashed the Bradys after him and the door flew shut behind them and the gas went out.

With startled cries, the detectives paused, wondering at this peculiar happening.

CHAPTER II.

IN A DEATH TRAP.

"Light your lantern, Old King Brady," exclaimed Harry. "I fear we are caught in a trap!"

In a moment more the veteran detective had the glow of his bull's-eye lantern flashing around the room.

There was not a window in the room, only the front and back doors breaking into the four dingy papered walls.

Upon the table lay the stolen letters.

Harry picked them up and put them in his pockets.

"I've got them," he remarked.

"Try the doors," said Old King Brady.

Going to the rear of the room, Harry made an effort to open the heavy door, but found it secured.

"Can't open it," he announced finally.

"See if we can break it down," suggested old King Brady.

They rushed at the door and hurled themselves against it, but it was so solid and strong they could not even shake it.

"No use," said Harry, in tones of disgust.

"Let's get out of here and procure an ax. I am anxious to see where that door leads to," said the old detective.

They returned to the front door.

But it was fastened as securely as the other.

When they tried to break it open and found the attempt useless the full danger of their situation dawned upon their minds.

"My fear is realized," said Harry gloomily. "We've been caught in a trap from which there seems to be no chance of escape."

"The situation is mighty serious," remarked Old King Brady after a few moments' reflection.

He walked over to the gas fixture and found it open, although no gas was coming out of the burner.

"Some one has turned off the gas at the meter," he exclaimed.

"These mail thieves are desperate ruffians," Harry answered.

"It's evident that they fear us. In fact, it looks as if they learned that the Postmaster engaged us to run them down and they've been watching us. Dalton must only be one of a gang."

"Such desperate men wouldn't stop at murder, Old King Brady."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because they are attempting to kill us now."

"I don't understand you, Harry."

"Don't you smell the gas?"

"I do."

"Well, it's pouring into this room now."

"From that fixture?"

"Yes. You didn't turn it off. Come here and you'll see I'm right."

The old detective was startled, for when he approached the burner again he now found the gas flowing from it.

He promptly turned it off.

The glances of the detectives met.

"Harry," muttered Old King Brady solemnly, "the par-

ties who turned off the gas to put out the light have turned it on again in order to smother us in this room."

"That shows how they fear us," replied the boy. "The red-headed man knew us, but I didn't recognize him. If there's a gang around here he has betrayed our identity to them. They mean to murder us, to stop us from catching them."

"But we've baffled their plan before it became effective."

"If we don't get out of here they may kill us yet by starvation."

"I've got a plan in view, but it's a fearful risk."

Old King Brady was going to ask the boy what it was when there came a sudden flash of fire at a spot high up on the wall, the report of a pistol and the whirr of a bullet.

It struck the dark lantern, smashed it, put out the light and knocked it out of Old King Brady's hand to the floor.

The Bradys were amazed at this attack.

A dense gloom settled down upon the room.

"Where did that shot come from?" Harry gasped.

"A hole in the wall," replied his partner.

The next minute half a dozen more flashes were seen bursting out from the walls on all sides of the room, followed by violent reports and the whiz of bullets.

Several of the leaden pellets flew dangerously close to the startled detectives and buried themselves in the floor.

Old King Brady was furious and he roared:

"Trying to kill us like rats in a trap!"

"Seek a place of safety!" panted Harry nervously.

"There's no place to go. There's no protection here."

"Huddle up in a corner," whispered the boy.

"All right! They may fire again."

And away they glided in opposite directions.

No sooner were they crouching in the corners when another deadly volley was discharged into the room.

They could see the flashes in the gloom; the confined space made the reports ring deafeningly and they could hear the bullets whistling around like swarms of angry hornets.

Several volleys were thus fired.

But the positions occupied by the officers were such that the angles of the flying bullets carried them away from the Bradys.

In order to deceive their foes, however, Old King Brady resorted to a ruse to bring a stop to the firing.

Giving utterance to a wild cry, he flung himself upon the floor and began to groan dismally.

It was so well enacted that Harry was deceived and rushed frantically to his side, crying in alarmed tones:

"Oh, they've killed him! They've killed him!"

"Ain't hurt a bit," whispered the old man reassuringly.

"Thunder!" came the surprised reply.

"Follow my example."

"Wait till the shots come again."

There was a brief interval of intense silence.

Several more spiteful shots pealed out again and Harry gave a scream and bumping heavily on the floor, he yelled:

"I'm killed! Help! Help! I'm dying!"

The firing ceased like magic.

They heard a jeering laugh in smothered tones come out from somewhere in the gloom and then there was a deep silence.

Harry crept over to his partner and whispered:

"You go to one door and I'll guard the other. Those scoundrels may come in to see the effect of their shots and we can leap on them and fight our way out of here."

Old King Brady was favorably impressed with this plan.

They carried it out, each one crouching in a doorway.

An hour slipped by, but no one attempted to enter.

When two hours more of alert watching, deep silence and patient waiting slipped along and nothing occurred, the Bradys abandoned their vigil and met again.

"They've gone away," said the boy aloud.

"Hush! They may be listening," whispered his partner.

"We'll draw their fire and make them betray their presence if they are still lurking near by."

The loud talk had no effect, however.

Finally Old King Brady remarked in relieved tones:

"They must be gone."

"We can now attempt to escape then," answered Harry.

"You were going to propose a plan to do so."

"So I was. But it's an appalling risk."

"Name your idea."

"To burn down the front door."

"How can you?"

"By smashing the table and building a bonfire against the door," replied Harry. "Of course, we may thus set fire to the whole building. But that's a risk we have got to run."

"Try the experiment, Harry."

"Very well. If we find the flames trying to injure us we can stamp out the fire easily enough if it don't spread too fast."

They demolished the table.

The broken pieces were piled against the door.

Harry set fire to them and within a few minutes the whole heap was blazing ruddily, the flames licking up against the door, scorching, blistering and setting it afire.

Still no interference came from their hidden enemies and the floor of the room catching fire, the detectives were kept busy preventing it from spreading around.

Dense volumes of black smoke rolled up, filling the apartment and a stifling, painful heat arose.

This was a contingency they had not thought of before.

The smoke blinded the Bradys and made them cough and the increasing heat made them sweat and drove them back.

Although the entire door and its frame were in flames, the fire caught inside the wall and spread with alarming rapidity.

The detectives could not control it after a while.

They had to retreat further from the blazing door and the fierce flames spread out on the floor.

A roaring, seething mass of fire now confronted the detectives and a feeling of blank despair stole over them. It now seemed utterly impossible for them to get out through that awful sea of flames.

CHAPTER III.

A VACANT LOT.

The suffering of the two detectives became terrible as the heat increased and the smoke blinded and choked them.

Although they retreated to the end of the room, the hot air seemed to pursue them like a demon, scorching their skin and making it very difficult to breathe.

When the smoke was inhaled into their lungs at every breath they began to gasp and choke and the blood surged to their heads.

"Lie down on the floor," groaned Old King Brady, hoarsely. "There is less smoke there, for it keeps rising."

"Can't we attempt to get out? The door must be burnt down by this time," said the boy, complying.

"It's as much as your life is worth to attempt it."

"Hark! What's that?"

Lying on the floor, they listened.

A dull banging sound reached their ears.

It seemed to come from the direction of the burning door.

"Help! Help!" shrieked Old King Brady, half rising.

The knocking sound suddenly ceased.

"Some one breaking in," cried Harry.

They were electrified.

Both began to shout now.

The blows were repeated, growing louder every moment and they soon saw myriads of sparks flying in the air.

"Some one smashing down the burning door," panted Harry in wild, eager tones. "Ha! Hear that?"

There came an awful crash and a man's voice yelling:

"Any one in there?"

The Bradys sprang to their feet with renewed hope.

"The door is down!" cried Harry joyfully.

"One dash through the flame and smoke may save us," replied his partner. "Come on, try it."

"Wrap your coat around your head," replied the boy.

In a moment more they were prepared, and rushed forward.

Straight into the midst of the awful flames they plunged with their eyes shut tight at the last moment to save their sight from being destroyed entirely.

But they had the direction in which the door stood correctly gauged, for they realized the danger of making a slight mistake.

The flames wrapped around their flying bodies and they held their breath for fear of inhaling the deadly element.

A moment of appalling suspense ensued.

Suddenly Harry tripped over the fallen door.

As he was plunging forward head first, he felt himself seized and dragged ahead by a pair of friendly hands.

Old King Brady had gone straight ahead through the open doorway and found himself on the landing among several firemen, one of whom had battered down the door with

an ax.

Both detectives were rushed downstairs.

Their clothing was afire, but their rescuers beat out the

flames and when they reached the open air and breathed freely again they saw a big crowd being driven back by the police.

There was a fire engine close by.

Some one passing the house had seen the smoke pouring out of the hall and sent in an alarm that brought the firemen to the spot just in time to save them.

"Are you injured?" a policeman asked them in anxious tones. "I'll ring for an ambulance——"

"We are all right," panted Old King Brady.

"You'll have to go out of the fire line now."

"No, no. We are, like yourself, officers," said Harry, displaying his badge.

"Oh, I didn't know. That's all right, then. Put your badges outside your coats so no one will bother you."

The policeman hurried away.

In a quarter of an hour the fire was put out.

Joining the fire chief, the Bradys introduced themselves, explained how the fire originated, and Harry said:

"We want to examine those premises to see how that red-headed thief got away from the room we were in."

"Come up with me, then," said the chief.

When they reached the burnt room they saw that the damage was very trifling.

But the fire revealed some startling secrets of the old house. There were secret passages between the walls.

By standing in them and firing through small loopholes in the wall the villains who tried to murder the Bradys had remained hidden from view.

The door at the rear opened on a staircase leading down into Theater Alley at the side.

This little, old-fashioned building had for years been used as a gambling den, until the police drove out the crooks who used it and the secret passages and rear exit were built as avenues of escape when the place was raided.

The building has since then been torn down to make room for an enormous skyscraper.

Having discovered the secret of the den, the Bradys hastened over to the Post Office.

"We must try to get our hands on Owen Dalton before his red-headed pal warns him of what has happened," said Harry breathlessly as they hurried along side by side.

They entered the building and went to the Postmaster's office as rapidly as possible and were lucky enough to find him in.

As briefly as possible they told him what occurred and Harry handed him the rescued letters and said:

"The only missing letter was a decoy note containing a marked ten-dollar bill, which the crook got."

"You are mighty lucky to save these," replied the Postmaster with a smile. "I'll have them forwarded to their destinations much as if nothing happened to intercept them."

"Has Dalton gone out yet?"

"I'll send for him."

He rang a bell and a uniformed messenger entered.

Turning to the man, the Postmaster said briefly:

"Bring Owen Dalton, carrier, No. 1467, here at once."

The messenger saluted and withdrew.

Five minutes later he returned with the Superintendent:

"Dalton has resigned and left, sir," said the latter.

"When?" sharply demanded the Postmaster.

"Two hours ago."

"Give me his address."

"He lives at No. —, East 28th street."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Nothing except that he is very inquisitive."

"How so?"

"We frequently find him watching and inquiring about the registered letters and parcels."

"Valuable packages! Has this occurred lately?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was the last time?"

"To-day."

"Describe the circumstances."

The Superintendent looked puzzled a moment and said:

"Well, we are making up ten mail pouches to go out on the Boston express to-morrow morning. Dalton came poking around, inquiring where they were going, on what train, how many pouches there were, and, in fact, he made such a nuisance of himself that he was ordered away."

The Bradys smiled grimly and Harry remarked:

"Sizing up a valuable lot to rob the mail no doubt."

The Postmaster looked alarmed.

"Do you think so?" he asked anxiously.

"We certainly do."

"You may prevent it by arresting him at his home."

"We are going up there now."

"That relieves my mind, Mr. Brady."

"Give us all the particulars about that registered matter."

This was done and the detectives departed for home, where they changed their clothes and attended to the few burns they got.

When this was done, they left their Irving place lodgings and made their way to Dalton's address.

To their disgust, they found it to be a vacant lot!

"Duped!" exclaimed Harry.

"He's a clever rogue," Old King Brady remarked dryly.

"There's no telling where to find him now."

"No, but I've got a suspicion."

"To what do you refer?"

"It's my firm belief that he intends to make an effort to rob the Boston express train to-morrow. All his actions and interest in the mail parcels seemed to indicate that he had secret designs upon it."

"In that case," replied Harry, "it might pay us to go to the depot to-morrow with that mail and see that no harm befalls it. The parcels and letters probably are worth thousands of dollars."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE BAG.

On the following morning ten bags of registered mail matter were sent to the Mail street wagon shed, to be taken away to Boston.

There were two men handling the mail and they gave an inspector a receipt for the ten bags and one of the big vans backed in to the platform to take the big blue and white striped pouches.

The driver descended from his seat, unlocked the rear doors of his van and the porters tossed the bags into the wagon.

When they were laden on the wagon the driver locked the doors and signed a receipt for the ten bags and took a duplicate receipt to be signed when he delivered the bags at the railroad depot.

The Bradys were lurking near by, intently watching all these proceedings, until the wagon drove away.

Near by they had a cab waiting for them.

As soon as the mail wagon was gone the detectives boarded the cab and the driver sent his horse in pursuit of the mail wagon.

Straight up Broadway went the two vehicles as far as 42d street, and, turning into the latter thoroughfare, they proceeded to the Grand Central Depot.

The mail wagon turned into Depew Place, beside the depot.

Backing his wagon up to the platform, the driver descended from his seat again and unlocked the rear doors.

Two employees of the Post Office were there to receive the bags.

The Bradys having alighted from the cab and dismissed the driver, took up a position where they could watch the mail bags.

They saw the Post Office agents step into the wagon, seize the sealed pouches by their necks and drag them out of the wagon upon the wooden platform.

When this task was done, they received the duplicate receipt from the driver, signed it and the wagon rolled away.

Then one of the men, who had been sharply eyeing the bags, suddenly exclaimed in startled tones:

"Say, Bill, this is queer!"

"What do you mean, Jack?" asked the other.

"You know I signed the driver's receipt for ten bags?"

"So you told me."

"Well, there are eleven bags here."

"Did you count them right?"

"Of course I did. Try it yourself."

The other man counted the bags very carefully.

A smile crossed his face, he nodded, and then he said:

"Yes, there are eleven bags, sure enough."

"They are very careless in the Post Office to make out a receipt for ten bags and deliver eleven to us."

The Bradys overheard this.

Both were intensely surprised.

At the Post Office they had seen only ten bags given to the driver.

It puzzled them to see eleven delivered to the men at the depot.

"How strange!" Harry commented.

"I don't understand it at all," said Old King Brady.

"I only saw ten put aboard the wagon at the Post Office."

"And so did I, Harry."

"Then where did the extra bag come from?"

"Blest if I can imagine."

"They are carrying the bags into the depot now. Watch them."

With hand trucks the Post Office agents were running in the bags one by one to the open door of a mail car.

Owing to the fact that these bags were valuable registered matter, they were not put with the regular mail.

It was necessary to ship it under guard.

For that reason it was placed in the mail car, to be sealed up with an armed messenger on guard.

In this car were some trunks and parcels, the trunks being used frequently to hold small mail packages.

As soon as the mail bags were put aboard the Post Office employees sealed the door of the car.

This seal was not to be opened until the train reached Boston, and as the train made only one stop at Albany, there was not much probability of any one tampering with the car.

As soon as the car was sealed the Bradys hastened around to the ticket office, bought passes to Boston and boarded the train upon which the mail bags were stowed.

The train started at eight o'clock.

Having planted themselves in a forward coach, from the front window of which they could keep the mail car constantly under their observation, the Bradys were carried from New York.

Several hours passed by.

Then a singular event occurred in the mail car.

The car was in charge of Mail Clerk Tom Daly, a short, powerful, young man, clad in uniform and having a clean-shaven face of great firmness and decision.

He had been tallying the parcels received with the account in his book, and having checked off everything by the light of a lantern, he sat in a chair and began to read a newspaper.

While he was so employed, the mouth of one of the mail bags which seemed to have been sealed, was quietly opened.

There was a man in the bag!

He stuck out his head and glanced around.

The man had a black mask over his face.

Seeing how absorbed the mail clerk was, he quietly got out of the bag and drew a bottle and sponge from his pocket.

The bottle contained a powerful drug.

Quietly creeping up behind the clerk, the man drew the cork from the bottle and poured the liquid from it upon the sponge. In the meantime he held his breath.

His eyes glared like live coals behind the mask as he bent forward toward his victim, holding the sponge near his head.

It was an odorless drug and for that reason the mail clerk did not detect the deadly fumes.

But as he kept breathing them a drowsy feeling began to overtake him and his head suddenly sunk until his chin rested upon his breast and he fell fast asleep.

When assured of this, the masked man flung the sponge out the little iron-barred window up forward and began to breathe naturally again.

He discreetly waited until the draught carried the fumes of the drug out the ventilator and then examined his victim.

A low chuckle of satisfaction escaped him.

He now turned his attention to the mail bags and examined them.

Some one had shipped six big trunks on this car.

They were empty, and he knew all about them.

He opened them.

From one he took a bundle of mail bags lined with rubber.

They looked exactly like the ones containing the registered matter, and he blew them up and left them.

Then he picked up the full bags and packed two in each of the trunks. The inflated bags were left in their place.

The masked man threw the bag he had been in into one of the big trunks, which was provided with air holes.

He then made himself comfortable for several hours during which the mail clerk calmly slept.

Finally the effect of the drug began to wear away and Tom Daly betrayed signs of awakening.

Observing this, the masked man got in the empty trunk and pulled down the lid, which locked itself.

Not a sign remained in the car of what had been done.

Yawning and stretching his arms when he awakened, Daly arose.

"By Jove, I must have fallen asleep," he muttered as he glanced around the interior of the car.

He thought everything was all right.

The substituted mail bags looked so much like the ones the masked man had put in the trunk that Daly failed to notice that an exchange had been made.

He glanced at his watch.

When he saw the time a look of astonishment crossed his face.

"What a long sleep I've had!" he muttered.

Then he sat down and resumed reading his paper until the train pulled into the Albany depot.

Here a Post official examined the seals on the car door and, finding them intact, he had a brief chat with Daly.

Then the train went on.

It was late that night when it pulled into the Boston depot.

Here the seals on the door of the car were opened by an official.

The trunks and packages were unladen, stacked in a heap to be carried away in wagons and the mail thief and his booty were thus taken off undetected.

A mail van drove up.

Just at this moment Daly suddenly discovered that instead of eleven mail bags, he had only ten.

The Bradys stood near by and heard what he said.

Both were amazed.

The next thing they discovered was the lightness of the bags.

The mail clerk was worried, but as the seals were not broken, he gave the bags to the van driver.

They were taken to the General Post Office.

Here they were opened.

It was found that they were empty!

CHAPTER V.

CHARGED WITH THEFT.

The Bradys had gone ahead of the van to the Post Office and found the Assistant Postmaster in his office.

Having explained their mission to him, Harry said:

"There is something so peculiar about the entire matter that we cannot understand it and demand an investigation."

"What shall we look into, Mr. Brady?" asked the official.

"In the first place, ten heavy mail bags were sent from the New York Post Office in a large van. It was van No. 3. We saw and counted the ten bags given to the van driver."

"Well?"

"The van driver delivered eleven heavy bags at the New York Central depot. We saw and counted them. But the driver did not seem to notice it. He was satisfied to accept a receipt for ten mail bags of registered matter. The two Post Office employees at the depot discovered that they had eleven bags instead of ten after the van had gone."

"How strange!"

"We saw the eleven bags put aboard of the mail car, we saw the door officially sealed and we rode here on the same train. All through the trip here from New York we had the mail car under continual surveillance. Only one stop was made in Albany. An inspector there examined the seals on the car door and spoke to Tom Daly, the mail clerk, locked in the car. The seals were intact. We alighted and the inspector not only told us so, but we saw for ourselves that the seals had not been touched."

"I see."

"Now comes the queer part of the story. When the train reached Boston and an official broke the seals on the door of the mail car and opened it, only ten bags of mail were found. And they are so light, it seems as if they were empty."

"You say the bags were heavy when shipped from New York?"

"Very. They weighed fully two hundred pounds apiece. Now they are so light that a little child could lift them."

"I can't understand that."

"Nor can we."

"And what became of the eleventh bag?"

"That's another mystery."

"Let us examine the bags."

They went to the receiving department.

Here they found that the van had just arrived.

The driver unlocked his wagon and flung out the ten bags.

The Assistant Postmaster and the Bradys examined the seals.

They bore the regulation official stamp and were not broken.

Moreover, the bags were regular mail bags that had been in use by the Post Department for a long time and the locks were of the regulation pattern and were secured properly.

The lightness of the bags was noted.

Then the Assistant Postmaster opened the seals and got one of the employees to unlock the padlocks with his key.

When this was done the air escaped from the bags and they collapsed.

They were turned inside out and the rubber linings were found, but there was no trace of a letter or parcel in them.

The Post official glanced at his specification of the supposed contents of the bags and saw that it called for 3,500 letters and 2,200 registered parcels, the values unknown.

"What has become of them?" blankly asked the official.

"Mail thieves have resorted to some clever trick to steal them, of course," answered Old King Brady.

"But how were they abstracted from the bags?"

"That's the puzzle."

"Mr. Brady, this is a very serious matter."

"I fully realize that, sir."

"Have you any idea how it was done?"

The old detective reflected before he answered.

Several explanations of the mystery flashed across his mind, but he did not hit upon the correct solution of the problem. When he came to a conclusion, he said:

"As the bags were heavy until they were put aboard of the mail car, it is reasonable to suppose that the mail was in them up to that time. Then, as the bags were light when taken from the car at this end of the line, it's fair to assume that the contents were abstracted while the bags were on the train in transit from New York to Boston."

"I share your belief."

"Tom Daly was the only person in the car, consequently he must have been the person who emptied the bags."

"Very likely, but how do you account for the locks on the bags being secured and the official seals unbroken?"

"Easily answered. Being connected with the Post Office, the mail clerk could have had a key made to fit the bags. He could also have supplied himself with a duplicate stamp and materials for making seals. By opening the bags and securing the contents, he could have fooled people by the looks of the pouches by putting in those rubber linings and blowing them up. But the light weight immediately exposed the fact that the bags had been emptied."

"I agree with your views. Now, when he got the mail out of the bags, what did he do with it, I'd like to know?"

"Why, he could have made a number of parcels of it and sent it from the car with the other parcels to be delivered at an address where his pals would be waiting to receive the bundles."

"Can this be ascertained?"

"Very easily, sir."

"Will you do it?"

"Certainly."

"What's your first move?"

"To arrest Tom Daly."

"Good! He might be made to confess."

"That remains to be found out."

The Bradys then took their leave and returned to the depot for Daly.

They saw him on the platform talking to a fine-looking girl.

She was Clara King, his sweetheart.

The girl was a blond, tall and slender, with regular features, deep blue eyes and had a sweet, pleasant expression.

Clad in stylish clothing and famous as an actress, she had just left a local theater and come down to the depot to see Tom, as she knew at what hour his train was due.

When the Bradys were approaching them she was saying:

"Yes, you may see me home if your work is finished, Tom. I've got something important to tell you, too."

"What about, Clara?" queried the mail clerk.

"A man I met to-night, who is in love with me."

"Another rival, eh?" asked Tom with a frown.

"No. You have no rivals, for I love you alone, Tom."

"Well, it's very unpleasant for a fellow to know that some other man is after his girl."

"Of course. I'd feel the same way if I knew that some other girl was in love with you, Tom."

"Who is this chap?"

"A person who calls himself Owen Dalton."

The Bradys heard most of their conversation, and the girl's last remark filled them with amazement.

"Wait!" whispered Harry. "Don't pinch him yet. Let us hear what else the girl has to say about the mail thief."

Old King Brady nodded assent.

Paying no heed to the detectives, the lovers continued their talk.

"How came you to meet this man?" asked Tom.

"I left the theater with my friend, Daisy Howard. She met her lover, Simon Gregg, at the stage door. Gregg had a friend of his with him named Owen Dalton, a big, curly headed man with a huge mustache and imperial. I was introduced to him by Gregg and he promptly fell in love with me and said so after we had gone to a restaurant for some oysters."

"Where does this Dalton live?"

"At Gregg's house on Way street, facing the Boston and Albany tracks on which your train runs."

"Not a very elegant neighborhood!" commented Tom.

The girl laughed, for she saw he was jealous.

Just then Old King Brady stepped up to them.

"Mr. Daly, I believe?" said he politely.

"That's me," answered Tom in some surprise.

Old King Brady laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You are my prisoner, sir," said he quietly.

The mail clerk started and turned pale and the girl gave a low, suppressed cry and recoiled.

As soon as Tom recovered his wits, he asked:

"What's the charge?"

"Robbing the mails."

"Why—I didn't do anything of the kind."

"You'll be given a chance to prove that when you are put on trial in court," said the old detective.

"The charge is false—false!" cried the young man hotly.

"I hope it may prove so," replied Old King Brady.

"Come along, sir."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRL DECOY.

With a troubled look upon his pale face, Tom Daly turned to Clara, held out his hands and asked her appealingly:

"Do you believe this awful charge, Clara?"

The girl rushed into his outstretched arms, nestled close to his bosom and, looking up into his eyes with a trustful expression, she cried in impulsive tones:

"No, no, Tom! You are no thief!"

"Thank heaven for that assurance, dear."

"I defy these men to prove it."

"Oh, we can do that," said Old King Brady.

"There must be some horrible mistake here, sir," said the mail clerk earnestly. "I never stole a thing in my life."

"The evidence against you is pretty strong, my boy."

"Would you mind telling me what it is?"

"Certainly I'll tell you."

And Old King Brady recited the facts we have disclosed.

The story staggered Tom.

He glanced helplessly at the detectives a moment and then he said in low, strained tones:

"Of course, it looks as if I were really guilty, but I am as innocent of that deed as you are."

"I can't see how the mystery can be explained except by the supposition that you got away with the missing mail."

"Well, I didn't," declared Tom. "Of course, I'm as puzzled about it as you are. I don't pretend to explain this strange mystery, but the true facts are bound to come to light and vindicate me some day."

"Did you notice that you took on eleven bags in New York and you only had ten when you arrived here?"

"I did, but as I could only find ten in the car I came to the conclusion that I did not count them right in New York."

"Well, we saw eleven bags put in your car. Now, where did the extra bag disappear to so suddenly?"

Tom shook his head.

He was greatly bewildered.

"I can't explain the mystery," said he hopelessly.

"But you realize now why we suspect you?"

"Yes. It's fair for you to do so under the circumstances, I presume."

"Of course it is."

Clara pressed Tom's hand and there were tears in her eyes, but she tried hard to appear brave to encourage him, and said:

"Don't worry, Tom. Go with them if you must. I'll do all I can for you. If they'll accept bail I'll get you out of jail, and together we'll try to unravel this strange mystery."

"God bless you, Clara. I'll brace up. You make me more hopeful. Good-bye for the present, dear."

He kissed her and after a fond embrace they parted.

"I'll meet you at the American House," called Harry to his partner, as Old King Brady marched Tom away.

"Very well. You look after the girl," significantly answered the old detective, as he strode away with his prisoner.

When they were gone Harry glanced at the girl.

She was bitterly weeping.

The boy approached her.

"See here, Miss——" he exclaimed.

The girl dried her eyes and glanced up at him.

"My name is Clara King," said she.

"And mine is Harry Brady," replied the boy.

"You are a detective, too, I suppose?"

"I am."

"What do you want of me?"

"I wish to help Daly."

The girl's eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Ain't you against him?" she asked wonderingly.

"No, indeed," replied Harry. "We only did our duty."

"But you believe he is guilty?"

"Certainly, else we would not have pinched him."

"Then why should you befriend him now?"

"Because he may be innocent, after all."

"Of course he is. I'm prejudiced in his favor."

"We have no prejudice. We go by cold facts only."

"But you are fair-minded enough to give him the benefit of a doubt?"

"That's the point," assented Harry.

"How can you aid him?"

"By fastening the deed on some one else."

"Is there any one you could do that to?"

"Perhaps. A man whom we know to be a professional mail thief."

"Indeed! Some one who may have done this job?"

"Well, he might be implicated."

"Tell me who he is."

"Owen Dalton."

"What! Do you know that man?"

"Yes. He's a crook."

"Good gracious! Is that so?"

"He's a fugitive from the New York authorities now."

Harry explained to her what Dalton had done in New York.

The pretty actress was startled, and she said suspiciously:

"Birds of a feather flock together. Therefore Gregg may be as big a rascal as Dalton is."

"Perhaps," assented the boy. "Anyway, we know that Dalton was intensely interested in the registered mail which Tom is accused of stealing. That makes us think he may have had a finger in the pie. If I catch him I might make him confess."

"You can catch him easy enough," said the girl.

"How?" demanded Harry quickly.

"I can show you where he lives."

"Will you do so?"

"Of course I shall."

"Will you aid me to capture him?"

"Gladly, if it will aid poor Tom."

"Very well. As Dalton is stuck on you I'll make a decoy of you."

"I'm at your service, Mr. Brady."

"Thank you. Mind, I don't say I can clear Tom by capturing Dalton, but I do say it's queer Dalton manifests such a great interest in that particular mail and afterward is found here where the robbery occurred. He may be in league with Tom."

"I don't believe it."

"Of course you won't admit that your lover is a thief. That is to be expected. However, by capturing Dalton some light may be thrown on this puzzling affair."

"I'll aid you to get him."

"Would you call on him and admit us to his house?"

"Certainly I could and will. In fact, my friend, Daisy Howard, who is engaged to Dalton's friend Gregg, went over to the house an hour ago. They wanted me to go, but I refused in order to come here and see Tom. Gregg was going to have a little social time there to show off some handsome oil paintings and fine etchings he just bought. Pictures are his hobby. I can go there and let you in."

"Do so by all means," eagerly said Harry. "While you and your lady friend are entertaining the two men I can search the house and try to find some evidence of crookedness on the premises. If they are mail thieves I can then find it out."

"You had better have your partner with you then," said the girl earnestly. "If you don't you might get in trouble. When he joins us we can make a plan whereby you can arrest Dalton."

"Very well," assented Harry. "Come along and we will get Old King Brady."

Half an hour later they met the old detective and explained their plan to him.

"Miss King can let us in and I'll remain downstairs on guard while Harry searches the upper part of the house," said Old King Brady. "If any danger ensues I can be signalled by three short whistles and come to your aid. On the other hand, if I whistle, you come to help me."

"Very well," said Harry.

"For my part," said Clara, "I'll see that the front door is left unlocked and I'll hold all hands in the parlor while you are getting into the house."

With this arrangement they hurried off.

Upon reaching Way street they separated.

The girl went up the stoop of a little, old-fashioned frame house and the detectives lurked behind the trees.

They saw her ring the bell.

A few moments later they observed Dalton open the door, warmly greet her, and she went in to act her part.

Waiting a quarter of an hour, the Bradys stole over to the house and, quietly ascending the front stoop, they tried the door.

It was unlocked.

Pushing it open, they entered the dark hall.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WITH A DAGGER.

As the Bradys crept into the dark hall of the little frame house, they could hear the voices of Clara, Daisy, Dalton and Gregg, laughing and talking in the parlor.

According to their plan, Old King Brady went to the rear of the hall, and Harry crept upstairs to search the house for some evidence of these men's crookedness.

"Gregg may be a crook, too," thought the boy. "If he's a crank on the subject of oil paintings, Clara is good enough an actress to keep his attention away from this hall long enough to give us a show to search the house before we attack and arrest the men."

The boy was provided with a dark lantern.

He found the two upper rooms furnished as sleeping apartments and a quick, silent search failed to reveal anything of interest.

A flight of stairs in the hall met his glance.

The boy ascended into an attic.

It was a murky place.

The walls were cracked, plaster had fallen out in places, showing the skeleton ribs of the laths beneath; spiders had spun their webs in the corners and there was no carpet on the floor.

As the young detective flashed the light of his lantern around the room, he could hardly suppress a cry of amazement at what he observed.

Stacked about the room were ten big United States mail bags, the mouth of one being open and the contents of registered letters were poured out on the floor.

Harry glanced at the tags.

His amazement now increased, for by comparing the numbers with his memoranda, he saw that these pouches were the ten mail bags taken from Daly's car, for which the empty, inflated ones had been substituted!

"Great Scot!" he exclaimed.

There was a gas jet in the room on the wall, and he lit it.

Putting his lantern in his pocket, he knelt down and examined the pouches very carefully and saw that he had made no error.

"How in thunder did they get here?" he gasped. "What sleight of hand did the mail thieves practice to get them here and leave substitute bags behind? The bags being in this house with Dalton and his pal shows plainly that they had a hand in the theft. In fact, they must be at the bottom of the whole job. How lucky I came here. We can recover the whole thing and pull the crooks in."

Just then Dalton appeared in the doorway.

He had left the parlor on a flimsy pretext and, seeing the reflection of Harry's light gleaming through the open door into the hall above, he became alarmed and crept upstairs.

In a moment Clara missed him.

Alarmed, she went hunting for him, fearing he would find the detectives and spoil their plan.

Unluckily Old King Brady had gone on an investigating tour downstairs in the basement.

Clara found him and hastily told him what occurred.

"He isn't downstairs," said Old King Brady.

"Then he has gone up and will find Harry," said the girl.

"There'll be a fight if he does," grimly answered the detective.

"I'll go up. You follow. If there's any trouble I'll signal to you as we formerly agreed," said the girl.

"Go ahead."

She hastily crept upstairs and Old King Brady followed.

Meantime Dalton, upon recovering from his amazement upon seeing Harry, crept into the attic.

The villain had a big dagger in his hand, and creeping up behind the young detective, gave him a violent blow with the heavy handle of the weapon.

Harry fell, partially stunned.

"I've got you!" hissed the villain.

He picked up a piece of rope, planted the boy in a chair, bound him there and tied a handkerchief over his face to gag him.

The young detective was rendered helpless.

Dalton flung off his coat.

He clutched the dagger in his hand nervously and kept watching the boy in a wolfish manner.

Just then Clara rushed into the room.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

Dalton was startled by her appearance.

He banged the door shut so hard that the glass in the transom rattled and turning the key in the lock, he cried:

"Don't you dare to say a word, Clara."

"Why, Mr. Dalton, I——"

"That fellow," interrupted Dalton feverishly, as he pointed at Harry, "is one of my deadliest enemies. He thirsts to put me in jail. I know him. He's here to rob me. But he won't. I'll kill him first!"

He brandished his dagger ferociously.

Evidently he was half insane from drinking, for he spoke thickly and his eyes were bloodshot.

"You must not do that," said Clara soothingly. "You'd get hung for such a crime in this State."

"I don't care," recklessly answered the man. "If I don't put him out of the way I may go to prison for life. The thought is maddening, maddening. I won't run any chances. If you love me as you say you do you won't give me away if I protect myself by putting that detective where he will never do me any harm."

"Oh, I can't allow you to imperil yourself so much," said the actress, pretending to be studying his interest. "What are all these mail bags doing here, Owen?"

The thief glanced at the evidence of his guilt a moment and then turning to the girl, he said in low tones:

"I'll tell you. They belong to Gregg and I. The contents are worth a fortune. Now see here, Clara, when you came in to-night you pretended not to care much how a man got money as long as he got it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," she replied, to draw him out.

"Well, you are the kind of a girl I want. I've already told you I fell in love with you at sight. I was delighted to see you come here to-night after you refused to come here before. It made our little party of four quite complete. We saw Gregg's pictures and had a social chat and Gregg and I were going to take you both home, when I got a sudden 'haunch' that something was going to happen. It made me very nervous. That's why I left the room. Glancing up the stair—well, I saw a light up here. Alarmed, I came up to investigate and found this detective here."

"I see."

"As I told you, he is my enemy, so I nailed him. I know you've got sporting blood in you from what you've said to me. Now I want you to stand by me in this deal. I ain't going to give you all the particulars until after we are married. If you act like a little woman we'll have loads of money and you'll enjoy the benefit of it."

"I'll stick to you, Owen."

"That's the talk. Now you run downstairs and leave me alone with this eop a while. I'll join you presently."

"I won't leave you," replied the girl, who was wildly anxious to aid Young King Brady.

"Then I'll put an end to the matter at once!"

A cold chill shot through the girl.

It made her desperate to see the deadly look on the man's face, but she hardly knew what to do.

An idea flashed across her mind, however.

She remembered Old King Brady.

All her reliance was now centered upon him.

A slight noise outside the door convinced her that the old detective had reached the upper hall.

The mail thief was going to stab Young King Brady.

Clara gave the signal.

Open went the transom and Old King Brady appeared.

Levelling his revolver at Dalton, he shouted:

"Stop! If you injure that boy I will shoot you!"

A wild yell escaped Dalton, and wheeling around, he glared at the old detective like a wild beast.

"The other one!" he gasped.

He expected to get shot.

In an effort to save himself, however, he suddenly reached up and turned out the gas.

As gloom fell upon the room, Clara shrieked and Old King Brady dove head first through the transom.

He landed on his hands and knees on the floor just as a scampering of Dalton's footsteps went across the room. Then he arose and lit the gas.

The door leading to the hall was still locked, but to the detective's amazement, Dalton had vanished.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRADYS SEPARATE.

Old King Brady's first care was to release Harry, of whom he asked:

"Did he hurt you?"

"Gave me a thump on the head that made me senseless long enough for him to bind and gag me," the boy answered.

"What are these mail bags?"

"The ten pouches of registered letters, for stealing which we arrested Daly."

"By Jove! Are you sure, Harry?"

"I've already verified it."

"How did they get here?"

"Dalton and his pal must know."

"Where did Dalton vanish to so suddenly?"

"Not out the door," replied Clara.

"How do you know?" asked the old detective.

"Simply because I've been leaning against it from the moment Dalton turned out the lights. He could not pass me without my being aware of it. Moreover, the door is still locked."

"I'll search for a secret exit."

The old detective did not have to search more than a few moments ere he found a trap door in the floor.

Opening it, a ladder was revealed.

It stood in a closet in the front bedroom on the floor below.

"We'd better go down after Gregg before he gets away with Dalton," said Harry, opening the hall door.

They raced downstairs.

The parlor door was open and Daisy stood in the room alone.

"Where's Gregg?" queried Harry, rushing in.

"Gone," answered the actress.

"Where to?"

"I don't know. Mr. Dalton just rushed in here, said something to him and they hurried out together without saying a word to me. Both were greatly excited, too."

"Chase them, Old King Brady!" cried the boy.

Away rushed the veteran detective and Daisy ran over to Clara, who had just entered, and cried in alarmed tones:

"Oh, Clara, what does this all mean?"

"We have been deceived by those men, Daisy."

"In what way?"

"They are regular crooks."

"What?"

"Mail thieves."

"Good gracious!"

"This is the den where they keep their booty."

"And these two men?" asked Daisy.

"Detectives who are after them."

"How dreadful!"

"Now you know what they are you'll have to give Gregg up."

"Of course I will!" cried Daisy. "He was a mean, deceitful fellow. Made me believe he was a traveling salesman. He gave me his picture to put in my locket to-night, but I won't wear it any longer. In fact, I'll destroy it now."

"Let me see it first, miss," said Harry quickly.

Daisy opened a little gold locket hanging on a chain she wore around her neck and took out a miniature photograph.

Handing it to Harry, she said:

"There he is!"

The boy gave one glance at it and exclaimed in tones of the most intense astonishment:

"Why, it's the man in the cab!"

The picture certainly was that of the red-headed, sallow-faced man he had seen following him and Old King Brady in a carriage on Nassau street in New York.

The two actresses noticed his agitation.

"Who is the man in the cab?" asked Clara, curiously.

"Dalton's pal in his mail-stealing operations."

"You know him, then?"

"Oh, we've had some experience with the man."

"Will the finding of those missing mail bags in this house secure poor Tom Daly's release?" eagerly asked Clara.

"No, I'm sorry to say it won't," answered Harry, shaking his head dubiously. "But if we fail to prove any connection between Tom and these two crooks your mail clerk may be discharged from custody for lack of evidence."

"Tom will never be satisfied until he is proven innocent," said Clara, her big, blue eyes flashing, "and the time is bound to come when we will prove he is no thief!"

Harry smiled and changed the subject by saying:

"Won't you bring a policeman here? We must secure these mail bags at once, Miss King."

"Certainly I shall. Come on, Daisy, we have no further need to remain in this dreadful house."

And they hurried away.

Harry examined the parlor.

Poorly furnished as it was, the walls were all covered with the most elegant and costly oil and water colors.

Gregg certainly had artistic taste and might well have been proud of all these fine paintings.

"I don't wonder at him wishing to show off these pictures to his friends," thought the boy. "I wonder if he came by them honestly? We shall have to confiscate everything here now, so that if Mr. Gregg wants his pictures he will have to go to police headquarters to get them. As he isn't likely to do that, however, the department may be the gainer."

Presently a couple of patrolmen Clara had found arrived at the house and when the case was explained to them one went for a Post Office van and the other remained on guard.

When the wagon arrived, the ten mail bags were carried downstairs and were locked in the van and carried away.

Harry followed them to the Post Office.

Here he met the Postmaster, to whom he detailed everything and the contents of the ten bags were examined.

They tallied with the specification of the ten bags shipped from New York which the detectives had been following.

"Not a letter or parcel missing," laughed the Postmaster gleefully. "Mr. Brady, we owe you a deep debt of gratitude. I'll never forget your efficient work. We'll telegraph to the Postmaster of New York how you saved these bags and the contents will go to the parties they are addressed to."

"If my partner only catches the two men in whose hands we found this mail," said Harry, "we may then congratulate ourselves for having cleaned up the job completely. Should they escape him, however, we won't stop until we run down the villains and put them in prison."

The boy went to the American House.

An hour later Old King Brady came in.

He had a disgusted look on his face and said to Harry:

"Dalton and his pal escaped me."

"I feared that they would," answered Harry.

"I traced them to the railroad depot and infer that they are heading back for New York."

"Their actions may be only a blind."

"Perhaps. We will know to-morrow."

"What have you done?"

"Telegraphed ahead to New York for the police to lay for them."

"That's one safeguard, but one of us had better go back there and try to find out more about how Dalton and his pal came into possession of those ten mail bags," said Harry.

The boy then told what he had done and they went to bed.

On the following day while the detectives were at police headquarters Clara King and Daisy came in asking for them.

When they met, Daisy handed Old King Brady a telegram. He read it and this is what it said:

"Miss Daisy Howard, No — Beacon street, Boston: Refuse information about me to every one. My life depends on it. Explain by letter. GREGG."

It was marked Chicago.

The old detective smiled serenely and handed it to Harry.

"Doubled on their tracks," he chuckled. "Foxy, ain't they?"

"Not smart enough not to give away their location by this telegram, though," replied Harry quietly.

"The wisest men make glaring errors sometimes."

"Going to Chicago in pursuit of them, of course?"

"That's a foregone conclusion, my boy."

Harry thanked Daisy for posting them.

When the girls were gone the detectives resolved to separate, Old King Brady to go to Chicago and Harry to proceed back to New York.

They laid out a plan of action for each one to follow and at nightfall they went in opposite directions.

On the following day Harry reached New York.

As he was going toward police headquarters he saw the negro in the blue army uniform driving his big, white horse down Broadway, and stopped him.

As the man pulled his rig up to the curb expecting to take Harry on as a passenger, the boy got in the cab and said:

"Drive me to the Federal building."

CHAPTER IX.

CONFESSION OF THE NEGRO.

Ignorant of his danger, the cabman drove the young detective straight to the building in which Secret Service headquarters was located, and pulled up near a policeman.

Harry alighted and said to the officer:

"Hello, Dick! Grab this horse, will you?"

"What for, Mr. Brady?" queried the patrolman, complying.

"I am going to arrest the driver."

"Me?" demanded the negro in alarm.

"Yes. Get down from that seat. I'm a detective."

Oh, good Lord!" groaned the darkey, complying slowly.

"Don't you remember me?" Harry asked when he reached the sidewalk.

The colored man carefully scanned him.

A look of recognition flashed from his eyes.

"I'se agoner!" was all he said.

"Take care of that rig, Dick," exclaimed Harry.

And seizing the negro by the arm, he led him into the building, a trembling and very much frightened prisoner.

When they entered the Chief's office, Harry arraigned the darkey before his superior's desk, and said:

"Good morning, Chief. I've got a prisoner."

"Hello, Harry! Who is this man?"

"The cabman who was in league with the mail thieves."

"Good! He's due for about ten years in Sing Sing, ain't he?"

"More than that if he don't confess all he knows about those crooks," replied Harry, winking at his Chief.

The negro's panic increased.

He glared at them with bulging eyes and gasped faintly:

"Le' nre go, boss."

"You heard what we said, didn't you?"

"'Deed I did."

"How do you like the prospect?"

"Awful!"

The Chief opened his blotter, picked up a pen and asked the man sternly:

"What's your name?"

"Jim Tomkins."

"Age?"

"'Spec's I'se about fifty."

"Residence?"

"No. 10 Sullivan street."

"Occupation?"

"Cabman, sah."

"Ever been in jail?"

"Nebber, sah, nebber."

"Do you know Dalton and his gang?"

"Yessah."

"How many are there?"

"Six mo' besides heself, yo' Honah."

"Who are they?"

"Fust, dar's Simon Gregg."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Nuffin' 'cep' he uster run a policy shop in Ann street."

"The joint recently burned?"

"Dat am de place, boss."

"Who else is in the gang?"

"Yo' know Mike Nally, de Pos' Office van driber?"

"The one who recently carried ten bags of registered mail matter to the Boston Express?" slyly asked the Chief, winking at Harry.

"Dunno 'bout dat. He dribes van No. 3."

"That's the very van you referred to, Chief," eagerly said the boy detective.

"Is he a member of Dalton's gang?" asked the Chief of the negro.

"He am, yo' Honah."

"Any one else connected with the Post Office?"

"George Carver, a van driber in Bosting, sah."

"And the remaining three?"

"One am Walter Rice, de nex' am——"

"Wait! Tell me who Rice is."

"A tellygraft operator. He ain't workin', dough."

"Well, and the next?"

"Monte Jack, de Western pickpocket."

"We know him well. And the last man?"

"Ole Bill Jones."

"The bank burglar?"

"Yassah!"

The Chief wrote all this in his book.

Finally he finished and suddenly asked the coon:

"How do you know the gang so well?"

"Kaze I done do all deir drivin' fo' dem."

"Ain't you a member of the gang?"

"No, sah!"

He spoke emphatically.

As the Chief was a good character reader, he saw that the cabman was not lying in order to shield himself.

"You must have done some interesting work for that gang," said he. "We expect you to make a clean breast of all your doings for them. If you don't I'll put you in the State prison and keep you there for life."

Tomkins was an arrant coward.

A look of horror and alarm overspread his ebony face and he raised his trembling hands imploringly, began to blubber like a little boy and whined in horrified tones:

"No! No! Doan' yo' do dat. Fo' inussy sake leabe me go. I'se gwin ter tell yo' all I know about 'em, boss."

"Well, proceed."

"What yo' wanter know de fust?" tremulously asked the negro.

"Where does the gang meet?"

"In Gregg's place, in Ann street."

"That joint is closed up now."

"Dunno whar dey gwine now, boss."

"Don't you dare to lie to me."

"No, no. Fo' de Lawd I don't."

"Do you know anything about the mail robbery?"

"Only dis, boss: De yudder day Gregg wuz in ma cab nigh dis yere buildin' an' see dem two fly cops, de Bradys. He spicioned dat dey wuz onter his game, an' p'intin' 'em out ter me, he tells me ter foller 'em. I done it. We seen 'em pikin' off Dalton, corner ob Maiden Lane an' Nassau street, an' we foller'd 'em up Nassau street. Dis yere young gemman mus' hab seed us, kaze he rush at de cab an' Gregg he jump out de yudder do' an' 'scape."

"Is that all you know about the matter?"

"Jes' a little mo', yo' Honah. I done drike aroun' de block an' run inter Theater Alley. Gregg an' some ob de gang 'cep' Dalton wuz in de Ann street policy room, I learn aftahwards. Anyway, when dey run out de side do' an' jump in ma cab, I was tole fo' ter drike dem to de railroad depot. On de way I heah dem talkin' in de cab dat dey shot de Bradys in dat room an' was escapin'."

"Where were they going?"

"Ter Bosting, sah, on de night train. Done heerd 'em say dey had a job put up wot wuz gwine ter pay dem big money."

"What did they say the job was?"

"Fo' ter job de mail clerk in de car an' get ten bags ob registered mail away from him widout him knowin' it."

"Did they say how the job was to be done?"

"No, sah. Only said dat everything depended on Mike Nally, George Carver, de Bosting van driber, an' Owen Dalton, de letter-carrier."

"Who was in your cab?"

"Gregg, Jones, Rice, Monte an' Nally."

"A big bunch to carry in a small cab."

"Yessah, but Nally left dem uptown, sayin' dat he had fo' ter dribe de ten bags ob mail ter de railroad depot next mornin'."

"Then those five were the men who shot at the detectives in Simon Gregg's gambling den, were they?"

"Fo' shuah dey was."

"Well, what else do you know?"

"Nuffin' mo'."

The Chief questioned him skilfully a short time longer, and failing to elicit anything else from him, he called in an officer and had Jim Tomkins sent to the Tombs.

"Your next step is quite clear, Harry," said the Chief to the boy when the negro was gone. "Go and arrest Nally."

"That's my intention, sir."

The boy left the office.

He made his way to Mail street, and having a brief talk with the Superintendent of the wagon delivery, he learned that Nally was expected in at any moment with van No. 3.

Young King Brady secreted himself and waited.

In half an hour he saw the wagon he was watching for come in from Park Row and run toward the platform.

Nally held the reins over a spirited team of bays.

The young detective left his covert and quietly made his way toward the wagon, to arrest the driver when he alighted.

But just then Nally turned, saw him, recognized him at a glance and, overwhelmed with a panic of fear, he drove away.

Lashing his team furiously, he sent them galloping toward Broadway, feeling sure that Harry was after him.

And this fear was realized when he saw the boy racing along after the van.

CHAPTER X.

THE FALSE GUIDE.

"Old King Brady," said an affable man with a black mustache, touching the veteran detective's arm, as he alighted from a train in Chicago, "I never expected to see you so far away from New York."

The officer glanced around at the speaker and paused.

"Monte Jack, the pickpocket!" he muttered.

The slim crook chuckled and nodded.

"I see you remember me," said he pleasantly.

"Last time I saw you I sent you to Joliet," said the detective in rather grim tones. "I rarely ever forget men I've convicted."

"Served my time and been out some time," said the crook as he strode along beside the detective toward the street.

"I hope you are behaving yourself now."

"Well, I ain't, Brady, I'm grafting again."

"Can't keep away from your bad habits, eh?"

"No. I'm driven to it by force of circumstances."

"How can that be possible?"

"Once a man is disgraced by having served a term in jail he finds it difficult to get honest employment. Nobody wants him. The prison odium clings to him. No one will trust him. He may mean to do right, but if people shun and kick him out like a dog, what can he do? He has got to live. He has got to have money in order to live. If no one will give him a chance to earn it honestly, what can he do? Nothing but earn it dishonestly. I tell you, Brady, it sounds very pretty to hear people tell you to be good, but when a poor devil isn't given a fair show, he is compelled to become a criminal again whether he wants to or not."

"That's all humbug," impatiently said the old detective. "If you didn't do wrong in the beginning you'd have nothing to regret in the end. A vicious man invariably comes to a bad ending and whines when he has to suffer for his sins."

"Well, I didn't brace you to moralize about my hard luck," said Monte Jack. "I suppose I ought to owe you a debt of vengeance for the stretch you gave me in prison, but I'm a good-hearted fool and I want to do you a good turn. I've got the chance to do so and won't let it pass."

Old King Brady gave him a curious glance.

"Do me a good turn?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"How?"

"Your life is in danger."

"Is it?"

"Yes. Two men have planned to do you up."

"Who are the individuals, Jack?"

"Dalton and Gregg."

"How do you know?"

"I heard them."

"Here, in Chicago?"

"Yes, they're in this town."

"Whereabouts?"

"At a cheap hotel on Randolph street."

"What kind of a steer are you giving me now, Jack?"

"I'm on the dead level, Brady."

"Got a spite against them?"

"I don't care to say."

"That would account for your giving them away."

"How would you like to pinch them?"

"That's why I've come here."

"Tracking them, eh?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Mail robbery."

"Oh, I see; so much the better."

"Show me where they are."

"Follow me."

They left the depot.

The pickpocket led him to Randolph street.

Pausing before a cheap-looking liquor saloon, Jack said:

"Here's the joint."

"Are they inside now?"

"Blowed if I know. We can easily find out."

They passed into the grimy little saloon and saw a big, fat man with a clean-shaved face standing behind the bar.

Monte Jack nodded to him and asked:

"Dalton in?"

"Yair; up in his room."

"Gregg, too?"

"Yair, Gregg, too."

"This gent wants to see them."

"Yair? Take him up."

The crook nodded seriously, beckoned to the detective and, going through a side door, he ascended a flight of stairs.

On the floor above the staircase opened in the middle of the house at the intersection of two halls which crossed each other.

Numerous single rooms opened on these halls.

Each row was numbered and Jack knocked at one of them.

It was opened by Dalton, who was in his shirt sleeves.

"Hello, Jack," he exclaimed. "What do you want?"

"Brought a gent here to see you," said the pickpocket.

"Who is he?"

"See for yourself."

And Jack pushed Old King Brady into the room.

The officer clutched a revolver in his hand and bounded forward.

Seeing Dalton and Gregg in the room, he aimed his revolver at the recoiling men and exclaimed:

"I want you fellows."

These words had scarcely left his lips when Monte Jack rushed behind Old King Brady, flung an arm around his neck, pressed a knee against the small of his back, and tried to garrote him.

"Treachery!" hoarsely gasped the detective.

He now realized that the crook had led him into a trap.

"Help, fellows!" yelled the pickpocket.

Dalton and Gregg rushed toward him.

Jack was squeezing Old King Brady's windpipe with his arm so hard that the officer's head was pulled back and he grew red in the face. He could not use his revolver at all.

All his strength was used to release Jack's arm.

Dalton wrenched the detective's pistol away.

Just then Old King Brady got hold of the pickpocket.

Possessed of enormous strength, the old officer pulled the crook around in front of him, picked him up, raised him above his head and hurled him at Dalton and Gregg.

He struck the latter individual like a cannon ball and bowled him over upon the floor.

Dalton levelled the pistol at the detective.

"Hold up there!" he yelled.

The detective glanced around at him.

"Turned my own pistol upon me, eh?" he asked.

"Stop where you are!" ordered Dalton sternly.

"Going to fire?"

"If you disobey me I shall."

"Then shoot away!"

And Old King Brady rushed at him.

Bang! Bang! Bang went the revolver.

Bullets flew around the old detective like a swarm of hornets and one of them came so close it grazed his cheek.

Old King Brady kept cool, however.

Reaching Dalton uninjured, he hauled off his fist and swung it at the man's jaw with awful force.

Bang!

Dalton went down and out.

Before Old King Brady had a chance to do any more damage Gregg had risen and picked up a chair.

The villain brought it down on the detective's head.

Crash!

It was a stunning blow.

The detective fell to the floor.

A groan escaped him and he rolled over senseless.

"Got him!" chuckled Gregg.

He pounced on the detective and bound and gagged him.

By the time this was done the door opened and Jones, Rice and Carver came into the room.

Matters were explained to them by Monte Jack, who had risen, and the villain said:

"It was by the merest accident that I happened to be in the railroad depot looking for graft when I saw Brady alight. I put up a game at once to trap him by bringing him here. You can see the result."

"What's to be done with him?" asked Gregg.

The sinister looks sweeping over their faces showed that all were of the same mind.

Finally Monte Jack growled:

"Kill him or he will arrest us."

A murmur of approval came from the rest.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

Harry Brady saw at a glance that Mike Nally, the van driver, had a guilty conscience and was afraid of him, else he would not have run away.

The team went dashing up Broadway.

People scattered like a frightened flock of sheep before the wildly plunging team hitched to the mail wagon.

But there were many wagons and cars ahead.

Before the van reached Chambers street it ran between two heavy trucks, the hubs of the wheels became locked, the drivers raved and swore at each other and the mail wagon had to pause.

That gave Harry a chance to overhaul the vehicle.

As he dashed up to it Nally made a motion as if he were going to leap from the seat.

The young detective raised his hand and shouted at him: "Don't desert your wagon here. You can't get away from me, no matter what you do, Mike Nally."

"What do you want of me?" demanded the driver in surly tones as he resumed his seat.

"I am going to arrest you!" replied the boy.

"On what charge?"

"Mail robbery, as you well know."

"I'm no thief."

"Then what were you running away for?"

"Who was running away?"

"You were. I'm not to be deceived as easy as you imagine."

The boy climbed up on the seat beside the man and Nally backed his team and freed his wheel hubs.

"Now go back to the Post Office," ordered Harry.

"I'm going to," answered Nally.

He turned his team and drove back to Mail street.

Arrived there, Harry said to him quietly:

"Now, come with me, my boy."

"Where to?" growled the man uneasily.

"The Postmaster's office."

"Say, what in thunder is the meaning of this?"

"Do you know Jim Tomkins, the cab driver?"

Nally turned pale and began to fidget.

Finally he exclaimed abruptly:

"Don't know such a person."

"Well, he knows you!"

"What of it?"

"The coon has confessed."

"What?"

"All about Dalton's gang."

The scared look on Nally's face deepened.

He now feared the worst and asked in shaky tones:

"What about Dalton's gang?"

"Oh, you know all about the mail robbery. You were in it. There were you, Dalton, Gregg, Monte Jack, Walter Rice, Bill Jones and the Boston mail van driver, George Carver, in the game."

These words confirmed Nally's suspicion that the whole game was known, and he blurted out:

"What are you going to do with me?"

Harry looked straight in his eyes and answered:

"Give you one chance to save yourself."

"How do you mean?"

"By confessing."

"What?"

"All about the whole scheme."

Nally became panic-stricken.

He was a very selfish man and asked quickly:

"Supposing I tell what I know, what then?"

"By turning State's evidence you will get off easy."

"How about the rest?"

"Every one of them is anxious to have the show-I'm offering you."

"Then they are arrested?"

"Every one of them," asserted Harry solemnly.

That settled the matter.

Nally fell right into the trap.

"Give me the first show, won't you?" he asked.

"That's what we intend to do. Of course, you haven't

got to say a word if you don't wish to, but I'll tell you this, if you don't, one of the others will, and you'll get left."

"I want the first chance," eagerly said the man.

"We'll give you a trial. If we find you are lying, why, we won't bother any further with you. We'll put you right in jail. One of the others will be called upon to confess. He will get the benefit I'm offering and you'll get the full penalty."

"I'll tell the truth!" fervently asserted the man.

Harry smiled, but made no reply.

The boy led his captive to the Postmaster's office. Confronting that dignitary, the boy said:

"I've got Nally here, sir."

"Good for you, Mr. Brady," said the Postmaster.

"He will expose the whole game."

"So much the better for him."

The van driver now realized for a certainty that his connection with the mail thieves was known to the Postmaster.

It made him feel decidedly uncomfortable.

Harry held a whispered consultation with the head of the Postal Department and a stenographer was called in.

"Take down all that is said," remarked the Postmaster to the short-hand writer.

"Very well, sir."

Harry now turned to Nally and asked him:

"How was this robbery of those ten bags of registered matter brought about? I want you to give us all the particulars without reserve."

Seeing he had no alternative but to make a clean breast of the entire affair, the miserable man replied:

"Dalton formed the plan."

"We know that," replied Harry.

"For a long time he has been stealing letters and pilfering the contents."

"That is also known to us."

"Finally he got bolder and formed a gang to rob the outgoing mails."

"The men I mentioned?"

"Yes, sir. The first step was taken for a gigantic robbery. It was carefully planned. The idea was to steal a big consignment of registered letters for Boston. To begin, Dalton had to get a mail bag key made. Then he had a false seal made. Next he stole eleven empty mail bags and had rubber linings made. When everything was ready Carver, in Boston, was let into the plot. By watching the Boston mails, Dalton soon learned that ten bags were to go to Boston on the Boston Express."

"He was caught snooping around that mail," said Harry.

"Well," Nally went on, "six big trunks containing ten empty pouches were sent to the depot, billed for the mail car and carried by my wagon, as if they were from the Post Office. Next, I met Dalton on the morning I was to carry away the ten pouches from the Post Office. Dalton got into my wagon. Here he got into the mail bag. I drove to the Post Office and took on the ten mail bags for Boston."

"That accounts for your delivering eleven bags at the depot instead of the ten you were supposed to deliver."

"Yes. I knew eleven were taken by the porters. They

put the eleven aboard of Daly's car and the train departed."

"We rode on the same train."

"Between New York and Albany Dalton got out of the bag. He was behind Daly, who was reading a newspaper. He drugged Daly without letting him know it. With his victim sleeping, Dalton packed two mail bags in each trunk until he had the five trunks filled. Before Daly awoke Dalton got into the remaining empty trunk with the bag he had been hidden in. The rubber-lined duplicate bags had been inflated and were left as substitutes for the ten stolen bags. Daly never noticed the way he was fooled at that time. The train finally reached Boston. Here the lightness of the fake bags was noticed for the first time. To Daly's surprise one of the bags had vanished. Instead of eleven he had ten."

"We saw that," said Harry. "Go on."

"Well, the trunks were stacked in the depot and Carver's wagon came and carried them to Gregg's house in Way street and another mail wagon took away the empty bags to the Post Office, where, of course, the deception came to light."

"I see," said the Postmaster, nodding.

"The mail bags were carried to the attic of Gregg's house and the trunks were delivered to the Boston Post officials after they were emptied."

"So that's the way the game was worked, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that all?"

"That was the way we planned it. A letter to me from Dalton afterward explained that the trick worked like a charm. We were to divide the swag when the excitement of the loss blew over.

"Do you know anything else about the matter?"

"No, sir."

They got the stenographer to typewrite this confession and when it was finished Nally swore to it.

He was then locked up and Harry departed.

"We understand the seeming mystery at last," he chuckled, "and it was a very clever game."

CHAPTER XII.

HARRY'S RETURN.

Old King Brady was in a dangerous situation, lying senseless on the floor in the room in which his enemies were gathered.

All the gang approved of Dalton's suggestion to kill the old detective, as the easiest way to put an end to his pursuit of them. They knew he had a view to arresting the whole crowd.

Two potent reasons actuated them to go to such an extreme.

One was that they knew Old King Brady to be a most merciless and persistent man, who would not fail in the end to capture and arrest them.

The second reason was that several of these men had been imprisoned in the past and had all the horror and dread of

a return to penal servitude, which alarms crooks who have served time.

It is a well established fact that most professional criminals would murder a detective to save themselves from going to prison for even a short term.

The danger Old King Brady was in can therefore be imagined when the gang surrounded him. Dalton relieved him of his handcuffs and Gregg bound and gagged him.

Not until he was rendered utterly helpless did they all feel perfectly secure from the danger of arrest.

Then Dalton said to Monte Jack:

"You deserve the thanks of all hands for the bold, clever manner in which you lured this old villain into our hands. He is the curse of our lives. Just so long as he is at large we cannot feel safe for a moment."

"The moment I saw him I realized that he got wind of where we came to from Boston," replied the pickpocket with a quiet chuckle. "He evidently got on our trail and came on here for the purpose of putting us all in jail. But I've nipped his game in the bud and he won't do us any harm now if we put him out of the way."

"The question is, what shall we do with him so we won't get ourselves into trouble with the powers here?" asked Gregg guardedly. "People may have seen him come in here with Jack, and it will arouse suspicion if he don't go out of here alive again."

"Oh, we can easily fix that," said Dalton. "Brady has done us a great deal of injury. Didn't he find the mail bags in the Way street house in Boston? We were cheated out of a big stack of money and valuables by his confounded interference in that job. We were put to a lot of time, expense and trouble to carry out that plan and he ruined the whole thing at the last moment by descending on us. It will be the same way in all our future plans unless we do something drastic to put an end to him now."

"What do you propose to do?" queried Gregg.

Dalton pondered a few moments.

He finally reached a conclusion, for he now said:

"Whatever we do must be done quietly. That's evident. We must protect ourselves against the law. I therefore propose that we compel the man to commit suicide."

Every one was startled at this bold proposition.

They silently glanced at each other a few moments, and when Gregg recovered from his surprise, he asked:

"How can you do that? If you release him and place a weapon in his hands he will be desperate enough to turn it upon us and not upon himself."

Dalton's lip curled in a smile of contempt.

"Say, Gregg," said he, "you certainly must think I am an idiot to dream of doing such a thing as that. Oh, no; we don't need to give him dangerous firearms. We can hold him and starve him a few days. He will be mighty hungry then. That's where we can begin operations. I would therefore suggest that we serve him with a good meal in which a small quantity of prussic acid has been introduced. Ravenous, he will devour the food before he has time to notice it has been poisoned. By that time he will have enough of the poison in his system to kill him and we will be

saved from the necessity of using more violent methods. In a word, we can't be punished for his death, for it will be self-inflicted. See the point?"

"It's assassination just the same."

"Perhaps the crime might be called such, but no one can accuse us of killing him outright."

"Where is the poison to come from?"

"I'll get it."

"If you do, be sure to go after it at a drug store far from here, so no one can get on to our plan or know that the drug was bought by one of our party to put an end to him. You must recollect that detectives have a nasty habit of running down such things. If they were to prove that we bought the poison that killed him we would be just as liable to suspicion and arrest as not."

"Leave the details to me, I'll attend to that. In the meantime, while I'm gone, you can put him down in the cellar, where he will be safely out of sight."

"Very well, don't be gone long."

Dalton nodded and departed.

He went far from the hotel and bought the deadly drug. While he was so employed Harry Brady came along.

The young detective had just arrived in Chicago and was going to hunt for his partner.

The boy saw Dalton.

He concealed himself and watched the crook.

Ignorant of the fact that Harry was shadowing him, Dalton bought the poison and departed from the drug store.

When Young King Brady started after him the boy was disguised.

He was clad in a plain black sack suit and an Alpine hat and when he slipped a gray wig on his head and fastened an adhesive, gray mustache on his lip, his identity was well concealed.

The boy carefully watched the crook.

Going back to the Randolph street hotel, Dalton went in and made his way upstairs.

Harry did not wish to lose track of him.

He therefore was obliged to form a plan of action with great rapidity and then he dashed inside the saloon.

Dalton had vanished.

But the boy rushed up to the fat proprietor and cried breathlessly:

"Did Mr. Dalton come in?"

"Yair; gone upstairs just now," replied the owner.

"I've got an important message for him."

"Yair? Then why don't you give to him?"

"Can I go to his room? I'm in a fearful hurry."

"Yair. He's in room 59."

"Through this side door?"

"Yair."

Harry hastily left the barroom.

The boy did not hear his enemy as he darted upstairs.

He soon found room 59 and paused at the door.

Voices on the other side reached his ears.

Harry listened

"Well," he heard Dalton saying, "I've got the poison."

"Good!" answered Gregg. "And we've put Brady in the cellar."

"Has he recovered his senses yet?"

"Yes, he did; soon after you went out."

"Nothing was said, I suppose?"

"No. It was useless, as we had him gagged."

"Where are the rest of the fellows?"

"Gone. They'll return to-night."

Harry's amazement was intense.

"Old King Brady must be here. Dalton's whole gang must be here. My old friend must be in the power of these villains," thought the boy. "He said they had him bound and gagged in the cellar. What does this mean anyway?"

The voices ceased in the room.

Harry was in a quandary.

He wanted to attack these mail thieves and yet he dared not for fear he would meet with trouble and thus be prevented from going to the aid of his partner.

On the other hand, he feared that if he were to leave them to go to Old King Brady's aid, they might escape him.

But he quickly made up his mind what to do.

"It's more important to find my partner," he thought, "for he may be in dire distress. If he is in danger I may be of great assistance to him. We may lose these men now, but it will not be much trouble to find them again. I'll let them go for the present and go to Old King Brady's aid."

He recoiled from the door.

Just as he was about to walk away the door opened and both Dalton and Gregg emerged into the hall.

It made them start to see him there.

They peered hard at him a few moments and, as Dalton's suspicions arose, he suddenly asked the boy:

"Say, young fellow, how long have you been lurking out here in front of our door, I'd like to know?"

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVING OLD KING BRADY.

The young detective saw that the two mail thieves were suspicious of him and that Dalton was intent upon drawing him out.

He did not get alarmed, however.

Simply changing the tones of his voice, he asked quietly:

"What business is it of yours how long I've been in this hall?"

"Oh," replied Dalton quickly, "we've got a good reason for knowing."

"Have you? Well, I won't tell you—see?"

The crook was nervous and gradually became excited.

Seizing Harry by the shoulder, he said in low, fierce tones:

"See here, sir. I want you to answer my question."

"Take your hands off me!" replied Harry angrily.

"Not till you give me a satisfactory answer."

"You won't, eh?"

"No."

"I'll make you!"

And the boy gave him a push with both hands that sent him reeling back against the wall.

Dalton gave a cry of rage.

Rushing at Harry with his fists clenched, he roared:

"I'll break your head for that, you dog."

And he aimed a blow at the young detective's face that would have knocked him senseless had it landed, but Harry was an expert boxer.

He leaped aside and sent in a left swing that caught the crook square on the nose and drew blood.

Dalton felt as if his nasal organ were smashed flat on his face, and he roared at Gregg:

"Why don't you help me, you chump?"

Gregg rushed at the boy from one side and Dalton from the other to wreak vengeance on him.

The young detective was prepared for them.

Bounding back against a wall, he whipped a revolver out of his hip pocket and shouted in threatening tones:

"Stand back!"

The crooks paused.

Dalton plunged into his bedroom.

Before Gregg had time to follow him Harry shouted:

"You stop or I'll fire!"

The gaunt-featured man obeyed.

"Don't shoot me!" he gasped in alarm.

"Throw up your hands."

Gregg did not rebel.

He saw that he was at Harry's mercy.

The boy stepped behind the man, drew out his handcuffs and snapped them on the villain's wrists.

"Thunder!" gasped the astonished gambler.

It now began to dawn upon his mind that Harry was a detective, and he glared at the boy and demanded:

"What does this mean?"

"Can't you see?" asked the boy.

"Am I arrested?"

"Of course you are."

"Then you are——"

"Harry Brady!"

"Oh! Lord!"

He was terribly frightened now.

All Harry's plans were reversed.

He had to arrest his man now and go to Old King Brady's aid afterward.

But he did not hesitate.

Seizing his prisoner's arm, he said:

"You come with me, Gregg; you tried to kill Old King Brady and me in New York, but I guess you won't attempt it again in a hurry."

"Going to jug me?"

"Assuredly. We know all about your game to rob the mail. Mike Nally is arrested and has confessed. So you see, all the lies and protests you may attempt won't do any good."

Harry conducted the man downstairs.

It was necessary to go through the saloon to reach the

street and Young King Brady thought he was going to have some trouble with the saloon-keeper.

But the sight of Harry's revolver prevented all opposition to his exit with Gregg and not a word was said.

In the street he met a policeman.

The patrolman gazed at the pair curiously and the sight of the handcuffs on the prisoner seemed to tell him that Young King Brady was a detective, for he asked:

"Arresting that man?"

"I am. Will you run him in for me?"

"Why don't you?"

"I want to go back to aid my partner; he is in trouble."

"Then I'll take charge of your man. What has he been doing, anyway?"

"Robbing the mails."

"All right. Your name?"

"Young King Brady."

"What! One of the Secret Service Bradys?"

"Yes."

"I've heard of you."

"I'll come around to the police station when I get my partner out of his trouble."

"All right, sir."

The policeman took charge of the prisoner and Harry hastened back to the saloon and ran in.

"See here," said he to the startled proprietor, "you are harboring a gang of crooks in your place and they are intent upon injuring my partner, who is a detective. I don't want to make any trouble for you, but by heavens, if I meet with any opposition here I'll have your place pulled and send you to jail in short order. Do you understand that?"

"Yair," said the startled proprietor.

"Now I'm going down in the cellar to get my partner. I know he's down there, and I want you to light a candle and come down with me as a guarantee of good faith. If you refuse I'll call in a cop and have you pinched right away. Are you going to do as I say?"

"Yair," was the reply, "but I didn't have a hand in any crooked work here. I ain't to be blamed for what my patrons do, you know."

And he lit a candle and cast a distrustful glance at the revolver Harry held in his hand.

"Where's the cellar door?"

"Over in that corner is the staircase."

"Do you mean to tell me a gang of crooks could carry a bound and gagged man from upstairs down through this saloon without your knowing anything about it? Bosh! You are in thick with those men and you know what the result will be if you fail."

"Yair," said the saloon-keeper. "Come on."

He went down the stairs and Harry followed.

They emerged into a dirty cellar.

Lying on the damp floor amid a mass of broken boxes, barrels, ashes, paper and filth was Old King Brady.

He could neither move nor speak, although he was conscious.

The boy cut his bonds and took the gag from his mouth.

He rose to his feet, pale, aching and angry.

"How did you find me, Harry?" he asked.

The boy told him and said in conclusion:

"You fell into Dalton's hands, I see."

"It happened this way."

And he detailed his adventures.

The saloon-keeper now asked them:

"Won't you come up and have a drink, gents?"

"No," replied Harry sharply, "but we will quit this joint and you can consider yourself lucky that I don't put you in jail for helping those crooks."

They went upstairs.

When the Bradys reached the street Harry told his partner what Nally confessed and the old detective was pleased to learn that Gregg was arrested.

"Let's go to the police station," he suggested. "We may find out from Gregg where we can put our hands on the rest of the gang. With Gregg, Nally, Tomkins and Daly in jail thus far, we have now merely to run down Dalton, Jones, Rice, Monte Jack and Carver to put the finishing touch on this gang."

"As the whole bunch is in Chicago," replied the boy, "we may land them all if we can induce Gregg to give their hiding place away. They will get word of our raid and won't return to that saloon again, you can rest assured."

They soon afterward reached the police station.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO MEN ON A CAR.

The detectives had a well defined plan of action arranged to pump some information out of Gregg by the time they reached the police station.

After introducing themselves to the captain, and when they explained their mission, he sent an officer back to the cells with the Bradys.

They found Gregg restlessly pacing up and down in his cell, a prey to the most intense nervous anxiety.

He glared ferociously at the detectives and cried bitterly:

"I see you saved your pal, Harry Brady?"

"Yes," assented the boy, "I got him out of the cellar and we have called to see you with a view to getting some information about your pals. We want to get our hands on them, Gregg."

"Then you've come to the wrong person for news."

"On the contrary, we've come to the right one."

"You can't make me squeal, Brady."

"No one wants to force you to do anything, Gregg."

"Then why have you got the gall to expect me to speak about my friends?" asked the prisoner curiously.

"If we had one of them we might disprove Nally's claim that you are the ringleader of the gang."

"I heard you pinched the van driver, but I never thought he laid everything on me."

"Then you are willing to stand for all the blame, eh?"

"No, I ain't."

"You'll have to unless we can cop one of your pals, who might testify that Mike Nally is a liar."

Simon Gregg considered a few moments.

The idea that the detectives were trying to trap him into a criminating admission flashed across his mind and he suddenly became reserved and said:

"Say! What kind of a job are you putting up on me now, Brady?"

"We ain't jobbing you. It's our firm belief that Dalton is the leader of your gang, and we want to prove it, for the party who put up that trick to rob the mails is the one who is going to get it hardest when we run in the whole bunch."

"Dalton did put up the job."

"Where can we find him?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do, but you don't want to give him away."

Gregg made no reply.

He gave the detectives an odd glance and walked away from the iron-barred door abruptly and sat down on his cot.

"Well?" said Harry, impatiently.

"I've got nothing further to say," growled Gregg.

"Nonsense."

"You only want to pump me."

"Very well, you'll get the worst of it."

They left him after that, for they saw that no amount of coaxing would do any good, and left the police station.

The Bradys put up at a good hotel.

Several days were spent scouring the dives of Chicago after that, but they failed to find any of the gang.

They remained under cover.

Two days later Harry received a letter from Clara King in answer to a telegram he had sent her.

Within the letter was a folded envelope addressed to her, postmarked from Chicago.

There was a letter in the enclosed envelope and when Harry took it out and glanced at the signature, he saw the name of Owen Dalton.

Clara's letter said:

"Dear Mr. Brady: Your telegram was duly received and in reply would say I just got the enclosed letter from Dalton. He is evidently in Chicago. I was glad to learn that the information you received from Mike Nally vindicates Tom Daly of the charge of robbing the mails, and I hope you will soon capture Dalton and his gang so Tom can be discharged from custody. The poor fellow was overjoyed when I told him Nally's confession. The explanation of the mystery surrounding the queer disappearance of the mail from Tom's car is the only plausible one there is, and I am glad it came to light at last. Hoping you are having good luck and with best regards, I am, sincerely yours,

"CLARA KING."

Dalton's letter was worded thus:

"Dear Clara: Owing to a false charge made by two fly cops, who are persecuting me, I've got to keep shady for a while. Am hiding in Chicago, but I expect to return to

Boston pretty soon and enjoy the pleasure of your society again, but I'll have to wait for this affair to blow over before I venture to quit this place. I could not resist the temptation to drop you a line and assure you of my undying affection. I hope you will seriously consider my proposal and marry me when I return to Boston. You said you didn't care what my record was and I'm taking you at your word. Of course, you know I ain't one of the best men in the world, but I can assure you of this: That no matter how wicked I may have been, I can reform and become a respectable man again if it is your wish for me to give up the hazardous life I now am leading. For your dear sake I would do almost anything. My fate lies in your hands. Let me hear from you when you can find time to write and send your mail in care of the General Delivery here and I will be sure to get it. Hoping this letter will find you in the very best of health, and hoping to see you soon, I remain yours affectionately,

OWEN DALTON."

Harry handed the letters to his partner to read and when Old King Brady finished perusing them, he said:

"By the aid of Dalton's letter we may now locate him."

"I hope so," laughed Harry. "You refer to the post-mark?"

"Of course; it's stamped Station S."

"Then it was mailed in that district?"

"Certainly. We must scour that neighborhood."

"Very well, and if that plan fails we can telegraph Clara King to write a decoy letter to Dalton and we can watch the General Delivery. When Dalton comes to get it, we can pounce on him in the Post Office."

The detectives went off and, having learned the boundaries of the postal Station S, they began a hunt for the men they were most anxious to arrest.

Nightfall found them on Clark street, not far from Lincoln Park.

A car came along brilliantly lighted inside, and as Harry glanced up at it, he gave a low cry, grasped Old King Brady's arm, and exclaimed excitedly:

"See there!"

"What's the matter?"

"In that car."

The old detective glanced keenly at the passing car and his eyes suddenly rested on Walter Rice and Bill Jones.

They were talking to each other.

"After them!" panted Harry, starting to run.

"We can't catch that car, it's going too fast," said Old King Brady, hesitatingly, but he nevertheless ran after Harry.

The car was going very fast.

After it raced the detectives for several blocks.

The car kept gaining on them, but they persevered doggedly and soon had the satisfaction of seeing it stop.

A passenger got off.

Brief as its pause was, it gave the detectives a chance to gain on it to some extent, and when it went on again they had drawn quite close to it.

On the next corner a lady and gentleman stopped it to get

on, and as the Bradys raced on, they had almost reached it when the conductor rang the bell.

Away it shot from them.

"Hey! Stop!" shouted Harry, waving his arm.

The conductor glanced back and saw them.

He promptly rang the bell, but the detectives had to race after it another block before it paused.

Both were winded when they finally jumped aboard and they stood panting and sweating on the rear platform for several moments to recover.

At last they breathed normally again.

Glancing inside they saw the telegraph operator and the old bank burglar still chatting away together.

But the crooks now glanced up and saw them.

Startled cries pealed from their lips; they glanced at each other and then they bounded to their feet.

"Look out! They see us now," muttered Old King Brady.

Harry darted into the car through the door.

The two crooks rushed for the front of the car.

CHAPTER XV.

PICKING UP SOME PRISONERS.

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

Harry gave this threatening cry.

The boy saw the crooks intent upon alighting.

Neither one paid any heed to his order.

Flinging open the front door with a bang, they leaped out and sprang to the ground, Jones falling and rolling over.

The motorman tried desperately to stop his car just as the detectives rushed out on the front platform.

"Can't stop them," Harry growled.

Then he leaped to the street, his partner following.

The car was then close to Webster avenue.

Jones had risen and rushed away in one direction and Rice in the opposite direction and Harry shouted to Old King Brady:

"Chase Rice."

"All right."

"I'll follow Jones."

"Go ahead."

Separating, they dashed away.

Jones ran down Webster avenue with Harry in hot pursuit.

Upon reaching Park avenue, the burglar turned uptown and sped along at a swift gait.

Suddenly he darted across the street and, jumping into the Park, he disappeared in a clump of bushes.

Harry followed.

The boy beat about until he saw the man again darting away among the trees toward Lake Winston.

The crook was far in advance and the boy drew his pistol and shouted:

"Jones, if you don't stop I'll fire at you!"

"Two can play at that game," retorted the crook, as he darted behind a tree.

The next moment Harry saw the gleam of a pistol and then there came a flash, a report, and a bullet whizzed so close to the boy's face that it stung his cheek.

Harry fell to the ground.

Sure he had hit the boy, Jones laughed, stepped from his covert and was upon the point of darting away when Harry aimed and fired at him.

He was a dead shot.

The ball hit the burglar.

Jones gave a yell of pain, staggered back, dropped his pistol and fell writhing on the grass.

Up jumped Harry and ran over to him.

The boy first secured his enemy's revolver and, having searched the groaning villain and finding no more weapons on him, he exclaimed:

"Sorry I took you unawares, Jones, but I had to do it to get the best of you."

"You've killed me, Brady."

"Humbug!"

"The ball is in my lungs."

"Oh, no; I've merely winged you."

"You can't fool me. I know."

"Let me see."

Harry examined him and found a flesh wound of little importance in the old rascal's side.

But he did not let him know how trifling it was:

On the contrary, Harry put on a very serious expression and said to the man:

"Badly hurt."

"I told you so."

"Keep quiet and I'll court-plaster it."

"Hurry up or I may bleed to death."

Concealing a smile on his face, the young detective dressed the wound and handcuffed his prisoner.

This done, he caught Jones by the neck and said:

"Get up!"

"No. Send for an ambulance."

"Move or I'll kick you."

Bill groaned dismally.

"You're a brute, Brady," said he.

"And you're a coward. It's only a flesh wound."

"Go on, I can feel myself bleeding internally."

Harry pulled him upon his feet.

"You come along with me!" said the boy.

"I tell you, I'm too weak."

"Do you want me to boot you out of here?"

"No. You're a heartless wretch, Brady."

"Come on, now!"

And he dragged his prisoner away.

In the meantime Old King Brady had gone racing after Rice and he chased the man down Clark street to North avenue, thence to the Lake Shore Drive and the fugitive ran out on a pier at the foot of Burton Place.

He had seen a rowboat moored there and when he arrived opposite the skiff, he leaped in, cut the painter, seized the oars and rowed out toward the Breakwater.

Old King Brady paused on the end of the pier.

He had no means of following the telegraph operator and could not swim else he might have dived overboard and swam after him.

But the old detective had a pistol.

He drew it out and opened fire on the boat.

Old King Brady did not aim to hit Rice.

He designed to perforate the thin planking of the skiff, make it leak and compel the boat to sink under the fugitive.

Bang! Bang! went shot after shot.

Each bullet tore a hole in the boat below the water line and the water poured into the skiff all along the port side.

Rice was frantic.

He thought Old King Brady was firing at him.

Rowing with all his might, he tried to put as much space as possible between himself and the detective.

But he soon saw the boat filling.

He tried to bail it out with his hat.

Reloading his pistol, Old King Brady calmly fired another volley at the boat, opening more holes in the side.

Then Rice realized what he designed to do.

It made him frantic.

The water was coming in so fast now that he could not stop it and it was only a question of a short time before the skiff would fill and sink beneath him.

A panic overwhelmed the man.

He stopped bailing, for it was clearly useless.

"For mercy's sake, don't fire!" he yelled.

"Come back here, then!" said the detective sternly.

"You'll arrest me if I do."

"Of course I will."

Rice was in a cold sweat.

He did not know what to do.

But he was soon brought to a decision.

The boat having filled now, went from under him, and he suddenly found himself struggling in the water.

Rice could swim a little.

He might have clung to the overturned boat, but he feared it would not sustain him and struck out for the shore.

A quiet smile crossed Old King Brady's face as he stood on the pier carefully watching the man's struggles.

The pier upon which the detective stood being the nearest point to Rice, he was compelled to swim to it, although he knew that arrest awaited him the moment he landed.

In a few minutes he arrived.

Old King Brady was waiting for him.

He helped the man to climb up on the pier.

"You've failed badly," said the old detective. "Why didn't you submit in the beginning and avoid all this trouble?"

"I haven't submitted yet!" growled Rice.

He seized the detective's throat.

Tightening his fingers, he tried to strangle Old King Brady.

The veteran detective was taken by surprise, but did not lose his self-control for an instant.

Reaching out, he gripped the telegraph operator, lifted him up in the air and hurled him into the lake again.

Down sank Rice.

He soon came up, sputtering.

Swimming back toward the dock, he roared:

"I'll give in! I'll give in!"

"Oh, will you?" demanded the detective. "Well, I won't run any chances with you."

He picked up a piece of rope and, as Rice climbed up the piles, he slipped a noose over his head.

The moment Rice landed on the pier Old King Brady gave the line a jerk, half strangling the man, and pulled him over upon the planks on his back.

The next moment he bound his arms to his sides.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CONSPIRACY.

"Hello, Harry, I see you've got Bill Jones?"

"Yes, Old King Brady, and you've got Walter Rice."

The Bradys met in the police station with their prisoners and these were the greetings that passed between them.

The police captain took up his pen.

"What's the charge against these prisoners?" he asked.

"They are mail thieves," replied Harry.

The captain took their pedigrees.

This done, he said:

"Search them."

Harry found a few trifling articles in his prisoner's pockets, but Old King Brady was more fortunate with Rice.

The telegraph operator had a postal card in his pocket addressed to himself in care of the Michigan House.

Pointing at the address, Old King Brady asked him abruptly:

"Is that where you and your pals were hiding?"

"Yes," said Rice, forgetting for an instant that he was betraying Dalton, Monte Jaek and George Carver.

When Bill Jones nudged him and scowled reprovingly, it was too late and, in a bungling effort to correct the error, Rice blurted out:

"That is, that's where I alone was staying some time ago."

"Your subterfuge is useless," dryly said the detective.

"We are going there to look for your pals anyway. We made a desperate effort to get Gregg to tell us what you let fall without any extra exertion on my part."

"I'm a fool!" angrily muttered Rice.

"You've given our pals away," growled Jones sourly.

"It can't be helped now."

"You should have kept your mouth shut."

"I know it; too late to kick now."

"Lock them up," said Harry.

The prisoners were put in the cells with ugly charges against them and the Bradys departed.

"If we defer going after the rest of the gang," said Harry, as they boarded a car, "the newspapers will publish the fact

that we've arrested Jones and Rice, and when Dalton and his pals see it, they will get away."

"Where is the Michigan House?"

Harry handed him the postal card.

Old King Brady read the address again, took a fresh chew of plug tobacco and began to meditate.

Finally he remarked:

"All right; we'll go for them to-night."

"It may be wise to disguise ourselves."

"That's easily done."

They rode on in silence.

Presently they left the car.

Going down a gloomy little by street toward a dim-burning lamp, they arrived at a cheap lodging house.

It was a resort for hobos, pan-handlers, crooks, and, in fact, all the riff-raff of the city.

Rooms could be hired or mere beds engaged from a dollar down to ten cents a night.

Before the Bradys went in they made themselves up to look like a couple of tramps.

Reaching the main room, in which the office was located, the Bradys paid for a room and lounged around smoking clay pipes and examining the guests.

Some were reading, others dozing, a few were playing cards and the rest were smoking and talking.

None of the men they wanted were among the crowd, but the detectives watched for them.

"They may be in their rooms," Harry whispered presently.

"How are we to find out where they are?"

"By inquiring. Some one here may know them."

"They don't register in this cheap joint."

"If they did we would have no trouble to find the rascals."

The detectives separated.

Harry approached the clerk.

"A man named Dalton living here?" he asked.

"Don't know any one of that name," was the reply.

"Dalton must have changed his name," thought Harry.

"What sort of looking fellow is he?" queried the clerk.

Harry described Dalton minutely.

The clerk pondered, then he suddenly said:

"We have got a man looks like that."

"What room is he in?"

"Number 78, sir."

"Any one with him?"

"Two: one called Jack and the other George."

"All in the same room?"

"No, but they go in the curly-headed man's room."

"What for?"

"Gamble, I guess."

"Are they in there now?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Well, that man can't be my friend."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders and looked indifferent. He did not care.

Young King Brady joined his partner.

"Found them," said he.

"Where?"

"Room 78."

"Let us see."

"Wait till the clerk ain't looking."

Wooden partitions that only rose six feet from the floor divided that story into numerous little rooms and compartments.

There were two corridors to reach them.

At the first chance the Bradys slipped unobserved into one of these passages and eyed the numbers on the doors.

Reaching 78, they paused.

A light glowed over the partition.

Voices were heard accompanied by the snap of cards.

The Bradys recognized the voices as those of Dalton and his pals.

"We are on the right trail," whispered Harry.

"Hark! They are speaking."

The detectives listened.

"I'm getting tired of this," they heard Dalton say.

"Well, Rice and Jones are pinched," they heard Monte Jack add in serious tones. "I was passing the police station to-night and saw through the open window that the Bradys were arraigning them before the captain."

"Chicago is getting too warm for us," Carver remarked.

"Why not clear out, then," suggested Dalton.

"I'm with you," replied Jack.

"And so am I," added Carver promptly.

"Either Jones or Rice might blow on us, boys."

"I wouldn't trust either of them," declared Jack.

"Me neither," said the van driver emphatically.

"See here, Carver."

"Well, Dalton?"

"Suppose we carry out your plan to-night?"

"To rob the St. Louis special?"

"Yes. It can be done by your method."

"I know it can."

"Moreover, we are hard up for money."

"Well, that train is the place to get the dough."

"Are you sure she carries valuable registered parcels?"

"I met an old friend of mine to-day who is connected with the Post Office and he told me that she's going to have a very heavy shipment. There's a fortune in it for us."

"We can't afford to let it go by."

"No, indeed," added Jack.

There was a long interval of silence.

Harry opened the door of a room next the one the conspirators were in, glided in quietly and stood upon a chair.

Peering over the top of the partition into the room in which they heard the three men speaking, the boy shouted:

"By thunder, they're gone!"

And out he rushed to his companion.

"Gone? Where?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Open the door of their room and we'll see."

They found the door unlocked and rushed in.

The room was empty.

Another door in the partition in the rear explained the seeming mystery and they passed through into a room similar to Dalton's and found that empty, too.

Out in the corridor they hurried and, making their way to the office, Harry asked the clerk:

"Did three men just come out?"

"Yes, and went downstairs just now."

Out hurried the detectives to the street.

They gazed around in quest of their prey, but the crooks had vanished from sight completely.

Their movements had been very rapid.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FURIOUS STRUGGLE.

When the St. Louis special left Chicago that night the Bradys were aboard, disguised in army uniforms and wigs.

Old King Brady wore a false beard and Harry had on a brown mustache.

They had not seen anything of Dalton and his friends when they left the Michigan House and had therefore gone to the railroad depot and boarded the train which the villains designed to plunder.

When the cars were well under way Old King Brady chuckled:

"Harry, we've got them cornered now. On board of this train there will be no escape for them. Going at our present rate of speed, they would not dare to jump off when we face them."

"We can pick them up at our leisure," replied the boy with a smile. "Let's look over the passengers and spot them."

They were in the last car and rose to their feet.

The train consisted of the locomotive, baggage and mail car combined, a Pullman sleeper and three day coaches.

Nearly all the seats were occupied by passengers.

The Bradys went forward.

Scanning every passenger in the coach, they reached the front door without seeing their prey.

Then they passed into the next car.

Here the same result met them.

With a feeling of disappointment, they passed through the third car without seeing any of the thieves.

"If they are in berths behind curtains in the Pullman," said Harry in disgust, "it will not be possible for us to see them."

"We have one recourse left, though."

"And what is that, Old King Brady?"

"In order to put their plan into practice they will be obliged to emerge from their coverts and enter the mail car. We can wait in that car for them, and the moment they materialize we can grab them."

"You encourage me again."

"Come along and we will prepare for them."

They went through the sleeper, but could not see any of the occupants of the berths on account of the curtains.

The end door of the mail car was open and they passed inside.

It was brilliantly lighted and was occupied by two postal clerks.

They were busy assorting the mail for quick delivery upon its arrival at its destination and glanced at the detectives.

"No admittance here!" said one sharply.

The detectives displayed their badges.

"Secret Service detectives," explained Harry.

"Oh, that's different!"

"We are here strictly on business."

"With us?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

"We found out a plan of thieves to rob you."

"Indeed!"

"The crooks are hidden somewhere on this train now."

"I see."

"They mean to get your registered bags."

"We are armed and ready."

"That's good; and we are here to aid you."

"How many thieves are there?"

"Just three."

"What's their scheme?"

"Don't know yet. We wish to warn you."

"We shall be on the alert, Mr.—er——"

"We are the Bradys."

"Oh! We've heard of you."

"What's up forward?"

"Baggage department."

"Door between locked?"

"No, sir."

"Who's in there?"

"No one."

The Bradys passed through.

Very little baggage was aboard; it consisted of a few small parcels, one flat trunk, a couple of bicycles and a baby carriage.

The detectives examined everything.

"No one concealed here," said Harry at length.

"Then they must be in the sleeper."

"Our best policy will be to remain in here and await developments."

Old King Brady assented to this plan.

Accordingly, they settled down on some boxes, examined their weapons and waited for the beginning of trouble.

An hour passed by.

Then there came a sudden shock to the train.

It seemed to rush ahead at increased speed.

"What's that?" queried Harry in surprise.

"I guess the engineer is putting on more steam."

"We seem to be going very fast."

Just then there came a shout in the mail compartment.

It was in the voice of one of the mail clerks.

Then a voice roared:

"Come here!"

"Don't fire!" groaned one of the mail clerks.

The Bradys opened the door and peered through.

Two masked men were in the mail car and were marching the mail clerks out to the rear platform at the points of the pistols they carried.

"Jump off!" exclaimed one of the masked men.

"It will kill us," replied the mail clerk, hesitating

"Jump, or we will fire at you!"

Up rose the masked robbers' revolvers, and before the Bradys had time to interfere, the mail clerks leaped from the car!

The detectives now saw that the reason the mail car was going so fast was because the crooks had uncoupled it from the sleeper and day coaches.

These cars were fast being left behind on the tracks and the locomotive was pulling ahead at a furious pace.

It amazed the detectives because the engineer and fireman gave no sign of having noticed it.

The moment the unfortunate mail clerks leaped from the train the two crooks rushed into the car.

Seizing the registered mail pouches, one of them eagerly bent over the tags, read them, and exclaimed:

"Here they are, George!"

"Are you sure, Jack?"

"Yes; help me to haul them forward; we'll get them on the tender of the locomotive and drop this car, too."

"Dalton went over the roof and must be holding up the engineer and fireman all right."

They seized the bags and began to pull them forward.

The Bradys crouched back like tigers and waited.

No sooner were the crooks well within the compartment they occupied when the detectives grabbed them.

Old King Brady had hold of Carver and Harry seized Monte Jack, but he tore himself free and recoiled.

Both shouted with amazement.

"Resist and we'll shoot you!" panted the old detective.

"Don't give in!" yelled Jack.

Carver struggled furiously and Jack dashed out the forward door with Harry in hot pursuit.

The villain grabbed the coupling pin while clinging to the tender and pulled it out.

For an instant Harry thought he was going to lose him and made a frantic snatch at the man just as the two cars separated, and the locomotive darted ahead.

The young detective's hand came in contact with the crook's jacket and he clung to it.

Jack was torn from the tender as it shot ahead.

He was held by Harry and dragged to the platform, where the young detective leaned over the guard rail.

"Curse you!" the thief hissed as he seized the boy. "I'll have your life for that!"

"Guess again," replied Harry, as he fastened a vise-like grip on the man's throat.

A fearful struggle ensued on the little platform as the car began to fall behind the locomotive.

To and fro they struggled, all Jack's energies bent toward hurling the boy from the car, which was still going ahead fast from the momentum it had.

Locked in a tight embrace, they fell to the floor.

Here the fight was renewed.

They rolled to the edge of one of the steps and neither one noticed the danger until suddenly they toppled over and began to slide off.

Jack made a desperate effort to grab the iron rail, but missed it and they plunged from the car.

Down they went in the gloom, and striking the ground with a fearful shock, they were separated and sent spinning in different directions.

The mail car dashed past them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

Old King Brady was having a desperate battle with George Carver, but he finally knocked the van driver down and handcuffed him.

Then he rushed up forward to learn how Harry fared.

The old detective reached the front door just in time to see the boy and the pickpocket fall to the ground.

Seizing the brake, Old King Brady turned it with all his strength and the mail car began to rapidly slacken speed.

When it was going slow enough the old detective alighted and ran back to see what became of his partner.

To his amazement he met Harry coming toward him apparently unhurt and when they met he cried:

"Why, Harry, I thought you were badly injured."

"Ain't hurt a bit," replied the boy cheerfully.

"How in the world did you escape?"

"Fell on top of Jack. He was badly cut and bruised and he's senseless up the track. How did you make out?"

"I mastered Carver and he lies handcuffed on the car."

"God for you! Let's pick up Jack."

They found the man and carried him to the mail car, and having disarmed and bound him, they placed him with Carver.

Just then Old King Brady happened to look ahead through the open door of the car and exclaimed excitedly:

"Here comes the locomotive back!"

"Dalton must be in control."

"We can lay in wait for him outside."

"Very well," assented Harry. "He evidently wondered why his friends did not board the locomotive with the registered mail bags and escape with him. No doubt he is coming back to investigate the matter."

They alighted, went ahead a short distance, and concealed themselves in some bushes near the track.

Back came the puffing locomotive until it arrived near the stationary mail car, when it paused.

From their place of concealment the Bradys could see that Dalton stood in the cab aiming a brace of revolvers at the engineer and stoker, compelling them to obey him.

Old King Brady gave Harry some hasty instructions, and they glided from their covert and approached the cab.

Pausing, they each aimed a revolver at the weapons Dalton held and took careful aim.

Both were magnificent shots.

"Now!" said Harry.

Bang! Bang! went the two shots, blending into one report.

Both pistols were struck and flew out of Dalton's hands.

It was an exhibition of superb marksmanship.

Dalton cried out with surprise and alarm.

In a moment more the Bradys were in the cab, increasing his alarm, and he started to retreat to the tender when the detectives sprang forward and seized him.

There was a short, fierce struggle.

"It's the Bradys!" groaned Dalton, recognizing their voices.

"We've got you at last!" cried Harry.

The engineer and fireman sprang to the detectives' aid.

In a few moments the villain was overpowered, bound and lying helpless and furious upon the coal.

"He took us unawares and held us up so that we had to obey him or get shot," explained the engineer.

"We are detectives and have been after him for some time," said Old King Brady. "He's a mail thief and designed to plunder the mail car, but we've baffled him and captured his two pals. They are lying secured in the mail car now."

"Well, this is a lucky escape," remarked the stoker.

"You'd better back up, couple on the mail car and then run back to pick up the rest of your train," said Harry.

"Where are the mail agents?" queried the engineer.

"The thieves made them leap from the car."

"Poor chaps, they may be killed!"

The locomotive was backed, the mail car was coupled on again and Dalton was put with his pals.

Then the train backed up.

Some miles up the track they encountered the rest of the cars and found the passengers and crew in an excited frame of mind. Matters were explained.

The conductor then told the detectives that the cars had overtaken the mail clerks and picked them up.

Both were badly battered, but suffered no mortal injury.

The train finally proceeded.

At the first station the Bradys and their prisoners alighted and when the St. Louis special went on the officers boarded a train with the crooks, bound for Chicago.

In due time they arrived there and incarcerated the prisoners.

Requisitions were sent for from the New York authorities.

On the following week they took the prisoners to Boston and, having gathered the entire lot, they went to New York, accompanied by Clara and Tom, who was now out on bail.

The Bradys called on the Postmaster, gave him a brief account of how they had smashed the crooked gang, prevented new mail robberies and imprisoned all the crowd.

He warmly congratulated them on their success.

It was soon afterward that Dalton and his pals were put on trial and the evidence of Tomkins and Nally was produced and convicted them.

Their conviction, of course, vindicated Tom Daly, and he was honorably discharged from custody and went back to his old position as mail clerk.

It is safe to assume that he was afterward married to Clara King.

As Gregg's true character had been exposed to Daisy Howard, she, of course, gave him up.

The postal authorities were more than pleased at the manner in which the Bradys exposed the mystery of the man in the bag which made that mail robbery possible.

Moreover, it pleased them to know that such a dangerous

gang of mail thieves was put out of business and would no longer menace the peace of the Postal Department.

Satisfied with their results, the Bradys soon became interested in other Secret Service work.

And in the expectation of seeing the pair again involved in the task of unravelling strange mysteries and fighting their way through other exciting adventures, we will bring this story to a close.

THE END.

Read "THE BRADYS AND THE BOATMAN; OR, THE CLEW FOUND IN THE RIVER," which will be the next number (164) of "Secret Service."

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